

Literary Gardens: Cultivating a Partnership between the Library and the Horticulture Center

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Abstract

In 2006, Illinois State University's Milner Library and Horticulture Center began a partnership to establish literary gardens at the Horticulture Center, which supports horticultural education and research and serves as a community outreach. While still in the planning phase, the literary gardens will be spread throughout the Horticulture Center, and they will focus on Midwestern authors who have written about plants, trees, gardens, or natural habitats. This poster provides background information on the Horticulture Center and the literary garden project, and shares initial plans such as the authors and their works, garden designs, and grant possibilities.

Background

The Horticulture Center is a new endeavor of Illinois State University's (ISU) Department of Agriculture. The Center, which is located on twelve acres north of the Normal, Illinois campus, is near the University golf course, a community college, and an extensive multi-use trail. The Center supports horticultural education and research, serves as a community outreach, and at its most basic level, aims to reconnect people with nature.

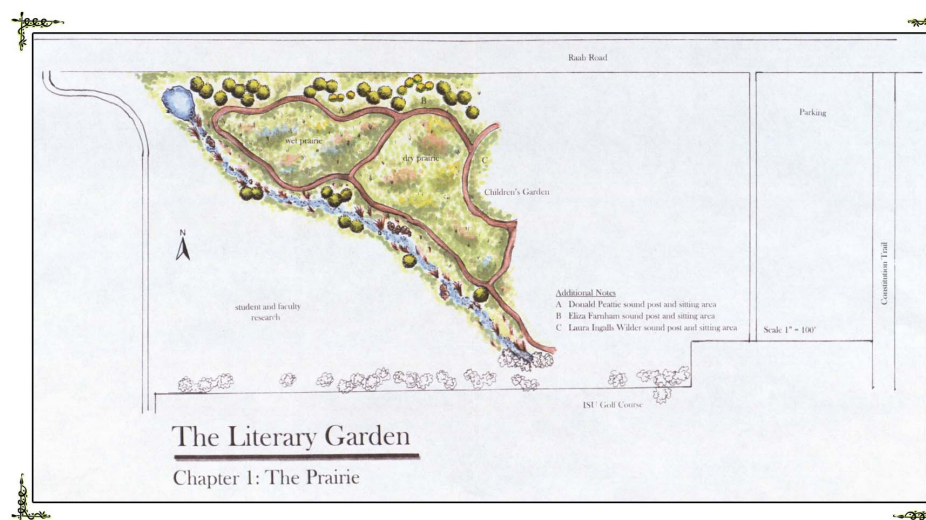
Since its inception in 2005, the Center has established a Volunteer Program and Friends of the Horticulture Center, launched a newsletter Q-cur bits, and twice held an annual Autumnal Festival. A Viburnum Walk and Children's Garden have been established, and two acres have been restored in native prairie plants. The Center showcases a featured garden every year, such as the 1857 Garden in celebration of ISU's sesquicentennial in 2007. The Literary Garden will be the newest addition to the Center, with the belief that, "Whether you are reading about gardens or in a garden while reading, greenery and literature are wonderful companions."

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The authors' highlighted works will be tied to their respective plants or gardens using sound post systems. These systems will allow the garden visitor to read information about the authors and their works and push a button to listen to passages from their works. For example, Louis Bromfield, an Ohio native, wrote a lengthy passage describing a garden in his novel *The Farm*. A portion of this garden could be recreated, and the sound post system would provide information about Bromfield and his novel, as well as an audio recording of the passage.

The initial phase of the Literary Garden will focus on authors who have written about prairies, which is a natural starting point since much of Illinois was originally covered by prairie. Many writers were influenced by the vastness and the beauty of the prairie. The first authors chosen for the Literary Garden include Donald Peattie (*A Prairie Grove*, 1938), Eliza Farnham (*Life in Prairie Land*, 1846) and Laura Ingalls Wilder (*Little House on the Prairie*, 1935).

horticulture center
ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY



Selected Authors & Their Works

Wendell Berry | Kentucky | 1934-
The Apple Tree, The Sycamore, Touch-Me-Not, The Wild Rose

Louis Bromfield | Ohio | 1896-1956
The Farm

Eliza Farnham | Illinois | 1815-1864
Life in Prairie Land

Lois Lenski | Ohio | 1893-1974
Corn-Farm Boy, Houseboat Girl, Strawberry Girl

Aldo Leopold | Wisconsin | 1887-1948
For the Health of the Land, A Sand County Almanac

Donald Peattie | Illinois | 1898-1964
A Prairie Grove

James Whitcomb Riley | Indiana | 1849-1916
The Clover, The Old Swimmin' Hole, Pansies, When the Frost is on the Punkin

Carl Sandburg | Illinois | 1878-1967
Flowers Tell Months, Hydrangeas, Lavender Lilies, Poppies

Gene Stratton-Porter | Indiana | 1863-1924
Freckles, A Girl of the Limberlost

Laura Ingalls Wilder | Midwest | 1867-1957
Little House in the Big Woods, Little House on the Prairie, On the Banks of Plum Creek, By the Shores of Silver Lake, The Long Winter, Little Town on the Prairie

Sample Passage

Imagine looking out over the restored prairie while hearing this passage from Eliza Farnham's *Life in Prairie Land* where the author describes her first impression of the prairie in Central Illinois in 1835 ...

"One of the great desires of my life that yet remained ungratified, was to see a prairie. Several smooth openings among the groves looked large enough to our uneducated vision, but the driver declared they were nothing - mere 'little meadows which would make smart truck patches by-and-by. Jest nothin at all in the way of a prairie.' But this did not restrain our exclamations of delight at the beauty around us. To all which came the reply 'Nothin at all, ma'am.'

I at last asked if we should pass nothing entitled to the name of prairie?

'None of much account,' he replied; 'thar's two or three smart little openings among the baarens, but the timber's scattered all over hyur.'

We crossed a little stream at some distance from the town, and our road thence onward, for more than a mile, wound among beautiful heights, thinly wooded and covered with the clean brown grass. As we mounted one of these the country opened before us, and swept away to the eastern horizon, a distance of many miles - a smooth, open plain, undotted by a tree or other familiar object. I can never forget the thrill which this first unbounded view on a prairie gave me. I afterwards saw many more magnificent - many richer in all elements of beauty, many so extensive that this appeared a mere meadow beside them, but no other had the charm of this. I have looked upon it a thousand times since, and wished in my selfishness that it might remain unchanged; that neither buildings, fences, trees, nor living things should change its features while I live, that I might carry this first portrait of it unchanged to my grave. I see it now, its soft outline swelling against the clear eastern sky, its heaving surface penciled with black and brown lines, its borders fringed with the naked trees!

No better proof of the reality of this prairie could have been given than the silence which it inspired in myself and my companion. We had burst into exclamations of delight a dozen times before, when the little glades opened around us, but now there was not a word uttered. Both were lost in contemplation of the sublime spectacle which lay before us. We had no inquiries to make. Nature spoke to us in her own unequivocal language."

Special Thanks

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Grant Possibilities

Ameren Corporation Charitable Trust
Services for youth, services for the elderly, education, and environment

International Paper Foundation
Education, especially environmental education, literacy, and minority career development

Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation Community Improvement Grants
Park and neighborhood beautification & enhancement; landscaping enhancements of facilities serving the community; community garden, park, or playground projects; outdoor learning environments; clean-up initiatives

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Keystone Initiative Grants - Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Initiative
Conservation of fish, wildlife, plants and the habitats on which they depend

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Special Grant Programs - Native Plant Conservation Initiative
On-the-ground conservation projects that protect, enhance, and/or restore native plant communities on public and private lands

Union Pacific Foundation Community-Based Grant Program
Community and civic projects (e.g. botanical gardens)



Designed by Jan Johnson
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