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Exercise in Beauty

By Lydia Holley

Henderson County Master Gardener Association has long maintained a cottage style garden, called the Dream Garden, at the East Texas Arboretum, 1601 Patterson Road, Athens. The Arboretum remains open despite the Covid-19 pandemic, although social distancing is requested.

Henderson County Master Gardeners have not met as a group since mid-March. Projects have been maintained with a skeleton crew of volunteers. Master Gardeners Carl and Cindy Beck have continued to maintain the Dream Garden. It is always beautiful, but this spring, it is glorious. We have had sufficient rain, warm days, and cool nights, all which have helped to prolong the bloom time on many plants.

This is the perfect time to meander the pathways through the Dream Garden. Cindy Beck reports that you can expect to see numerous plants in bloom, including "Iris, phlox, roses, penstemon, stone crop sedum, poppies, echinacea, yarrow, dianthus, amaryllis, wine cup, coral honeysuckle, coreopsis, blue salvia, and standing verbena." That is a long list of blooms to see!

The main attraction, however, is a plant that has not one flower on it right now. Instead, it has striking dark purple foliage. It is the Forest Pansy redbud (*Cercis canadensis*). This small tree, which grows to 20 or 30 ft tall, is an East Texas native that flowers in early spring. Afterward, Forest Pansy puts out dramatic, colorful foliage which greens up in summer. If you are looking for a tree with double the drama, there is a weeping variety of Eastern redbud known as Ruby Falls.

Eastern redbuds can be planted in full sun, although it would ideally appreciate some afternoon shade, as most of us do in summer in Texas. A deciduous tree, redbuds lose their leaves in fall, leaving a striking skeleton in winter. Because Eastern redbuds are nitrogen-fixing, they do not need much fertilizer.

If you are wanting to get out of the house for relaxation or exercise, you may wish to visit the Arboretum. Make a special effort to stroll along the Dream Garden's pathways. The beauty there is sure to renew your spirit.

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