



# HENDERSON COUNTY EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEERS CREATE AND EDUCATE BY CREATING A DESTINATION GARDEN; THE FLAT ROCK PLAYHOUSE THEATRE GARDENS

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## Objective:

The objective of the **Flat Rock Playhouse Theatre (FRPH)** Gardens is to showcase native plants, pollinators and to teach plant identification, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and best landscape management practices to patrons from all over the world.



## Situation:

**Extension Master Gardener Volunteers (EMGV)** have led a team of garden volunteers at the **Flat Rock Playhouse Theatre** since 2008. The Flat Rock Theatre is the state theatre of North Carolina. It is a very high profile facility that is visited by over 60,000 patrons per year.

Master Gardener Volunteer Tamsin Allpress started the 'FRPH Garden Volunteers' a dozen years ago when the playhouse grounds were mostly neglected. The 14 volunteers work together two times a week, from March to November. Since the pandemic started, social distancing has been easy to do on so large a campus.

Despite the cancellation of the Flat Rock Playhouse's 2020 season due to COVID-19, patrons are being encouraged to take time to enjoy the lush gardens on the grounds of the historic campus. In fact, the gardens have become a popular tourist destination locally.

Visitors needed labeling in place so they could get information on the hundreds of plants that volunteers lovingly tend each week. FRPH personnel are often asked about the plants in the gardens. The FRPH gardeners created and maintained a printed plant guide to hand out to patrons. Still, **plant labelling was needed.**

## Response:

County Agents and Extension Master Gardener Volunteers with NC State Cooperative Extension created the FRPH gardens as an education tool. Master Gardeners created a printed guide to the plants in the FRPH Gardens. In 2020 Henderson County Master Gardener Volunteers added **QR digital plant labeling** to enhance visitor experience (QR is short for Quick Response). The FRPH gardeners raised the \$800.00 for the QR signs through an annual summer plant sale.



## Results:

With a QR code reader on any smartphone, garden visitors can tap into information about the individual plants. The codes direct the phone to web pages on a **Muddy Boots** site that the garden volunteers control. Patrons visiting the gardens can now learn about the plants.



Standard and Custom Plant Tags



Over the nine-acre campus, there are **62 garden beds**, each with its own QR code sign. There are over **200 types of plants** represented. **Many of the plants are native. Pollinator insect friendly plantings** are a main focus of the gardens. **EMGVs also lead educational tours and classes in the gardens.** Theatre patrons FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD learn about gardening and the Henderson County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers through signage and mentions on each show's playbill.

## Conclusion:

Gardens are an important way to teach the public about the health benefits of gardening, native plants, IPM, and best landscape management practices. Efforts by Extension Agents and Extension Master Gardeners to create a destination garden at such a popular tourist site has resulted in hundreds of thousands of theatre goers learning about native plants, pollinators and landscape management best practices.



**Acknowledgements:** Special thanks to the Henderson County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers for donating their time. Thanks to the Flat Rock Playhouse Theatre for supporting the gardens and gardeners.