



How Does Your Garden Grow?



Creating An Outdoor Classroom

Did you know that the tomatoes you enjoy in a summer salad were also a favorite of early Americans? So were the radishes, okra, eggplant, squash...the list goes on and on. In fact, many of the vegetables, flowers, and grains grown today were introduced before the nation earned its independence, and the seeds have been passed along for generations.

Visitors to Vicksburg National Military Park now have the opportunity to share in this gardening tradition. The Heritage Demonstration Garden, developed and maintained in partnership with the Master Gardeners of Warren County, Mississippi, is a unique outdoor classroom experience. As a part of the *Let's Move Outside* initiative, the heritage garden offers educational groups the chance to enjoy being outdoors while strengthening students' relationship with their food sources. The site is based on a typical Victorian kitchen garden, and exposes visitors to the life of average civilians during the Civil War, their hardships, and ingenuity.



Designed by Master Gardeners

The garden is a collaborative effort between VNMP staff and the Master Gardeners of Warren County, Mississippi. Master Gardener programs exist across the country, and are comprised of volunteer educators trained by Land Grant Agriculture Universities to assist in providing information to the public about home gardening. The Warren County Master Gardener program is supported through the Extension Service of Mississippi State University.

Laid out in eight plots, the garden's design was developed by committees of Master Gardeners designated to oversee specific plantings, and is divided into three sections: vegetables and grains, herbs (both medicinal and culinary), and annual and perennial ornamental flowers. Plot designs incorporated age-old gardening customs such as *'three sisters,'* a Native American tradition combining corn, beans, and squash in the same mound, which,

according to legend, were three plants described as inseparable sisters who could only grow and thrive when raised together.

Newer gardening methods have also been implemented, including one entire section of herbs prepared as a *'lasagna garden.'* This layering method creates a rich fluffy soil without digging or tilling, using heavily watered alternate layers such as leaves, peat, straw, newspaper, and grass clippings. The method will typically result in suppressed weed growth, more water retention, and require less fertilizer, and with continued mulching, will allow for a less labor-intensive garden plot.



Heritage/Heirloom Plants



Several of the plants found in the garden are classified as 'heritage' or 'heirloom' varieties. Definitions vary, but generally, heirlooms are considered plant varieties with stable traits from one generation to the next. They are fairly similar to each other but are more diversified than the modern-day hybrid varieties found in today's grocery stores. They are open-pollinated and usually grown in fields where they self- and cross-pollinate.

The advantage of heirloom plants is that they can continually be grown by carefully saving the seeds. A heritage plant can be one that has been successfully grown from these seeds which have been collected, dried, and replanted for many years.

Although not all the plants in the garden are heirlooms, most are varieties of plants grown in this land for centuries, including:

Basil (h)	Peppers (Bell) (v)
Beans (v)	Peppers (spicy) (v)
Canna (fl)	Rice (g)
Corn (g)	Rosemary (h)
Cotton (fb)	Roses (fl)
Cucumbers (v)	Spirea (fl)
Dusty Miller (fl)	Squash (v)
Eggplant (v)	Sunflower (fl)
Hyacinth Bean (fl)	Sweet potatoes (v)
Iris (fl)	Tomatoes (fr)
Melons (fr/v)	Thyme (h)
Onions (v)	Vinca (fl)
Okra (v)	Watermelons (fr/v)
Peas (v)	

fb = fibers; fl = flowers; fr = fruits; g = grains; h = herbs; v = vegetables

Education and Interpretation



Currently, most of the educational and interpretive programs at Vicksburg National Military Park focus on the military significance of the campaign and siege of Vicksburg. However, the construction and interpretation of the heritage garden has sparked the interest of a new kind of audience. Women, children and minorities, not typically included in the military narrative of the park, find their stories highlighted within the garden. Programs developed for educational workshops, school groups, and Junior Rangers encourage a deeper understanding of the civilian experience.

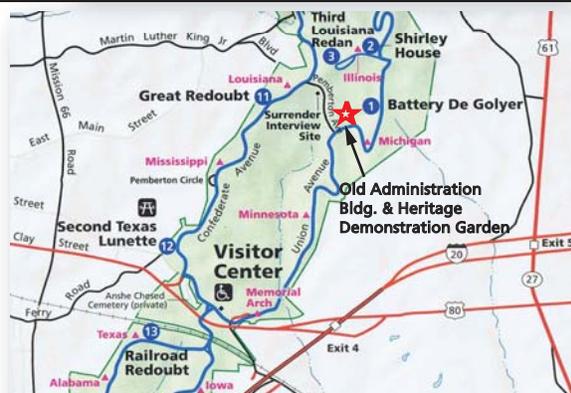
The garden also acts as an outdoor classroom for the biological sciences, providing a hands-on learning opportunity dedicated to themes of soil and water management, heirloom plantings, 'green' gardening, and traditional pest control management practiced during the 19th century.



Location



The garden is located on Pemberton Avenue approximately one mile from the main entrance along the park tour road. Situated in front of the Old Administration Building, the site is open to visitors during regular park hours (entrance fees apply), and can be entered through pedestrian gates (ADA-accessible) located at either end of the garden.



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References Cited:

- Adams, D.W. 2004. *Restoring American Gardens: An Encyclopedia of Heirloom Ornamental Plants, 1640-1940*. Timber Press, Inc.
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 Favretti, R.J. & Favretti, J.P. 1997. *Landscaping and Gardens for Historic Buildings (2d ed.)*. AltaMira Press.
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