

# Azalea Gardens

## Tyler Junior College's Brundrett Azalea Garden Grows Up

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### Background

Tyler Junior College (TJC) is located in lush East Texas, 110 miles east of Dallas, and is renowned for its academic excellence and its picturesque campus. Blessed with rich soil and plenty of rainfall, East Texas is also home to gardeners who are passionate about their azaleas and roses. The city of Tyler blossoms each October as the rose capital of the South, but it takes away the breath of anyone who travels its Azalea Trail in spring. The Trail is an annual driving tour featuring the flowers of the city's Azalea District.

### Early Years of the Brundrett Azalea Garden

TJC enrolls approximately 10,000 students each fall semester and serves about 12,000 credit students during the year. Founded in 1926, the college has flourished because of strong community support and involvement. This trait is beautifully displayed in a series of seven themed botanical gardens that have been planned to enhance the campus, provide educational opportunities for students and the public, and create unique event spaces. The gem on the chain of the linked gardens is the Brundrett Azalea Garden, which has undergone a \$140,000 transformation through the generous support of area garden clubs, under the watchful eyes of the college's Botanical Gardens Advisory Committee and a master landscape architect.

The garden is named for Ina Brundrett, whose passion for azaleas knows no bounds. "I could just plant the whole campus in azaleas!" she said with enthusiasm. In 1954, when she was transplanted from South Texas with its mesquite and prickly pear, Ina Brundrett thought East Texas and its piney woods, oak trees, and verdant spring colors looked like the Garden of Eden. She met a lady at church who was a flower show judge and who organized the ladies of the church to do floral arrangements. When the group formed a garden club a few years later, Brundrett joined and began learning about plants. Her friend, Katherine Steas, began moving up in leadership of the Texas Garden Clubs, in District III and later as a state officer. Brundrett traveled with her, eventually rising to state level leadership herself. She also took classes to become a landscape designer and has held national garden club leadership positions and traveled internationally to judge events.

In 1993, TJC had an eyesore—a parking lot with bad pave-

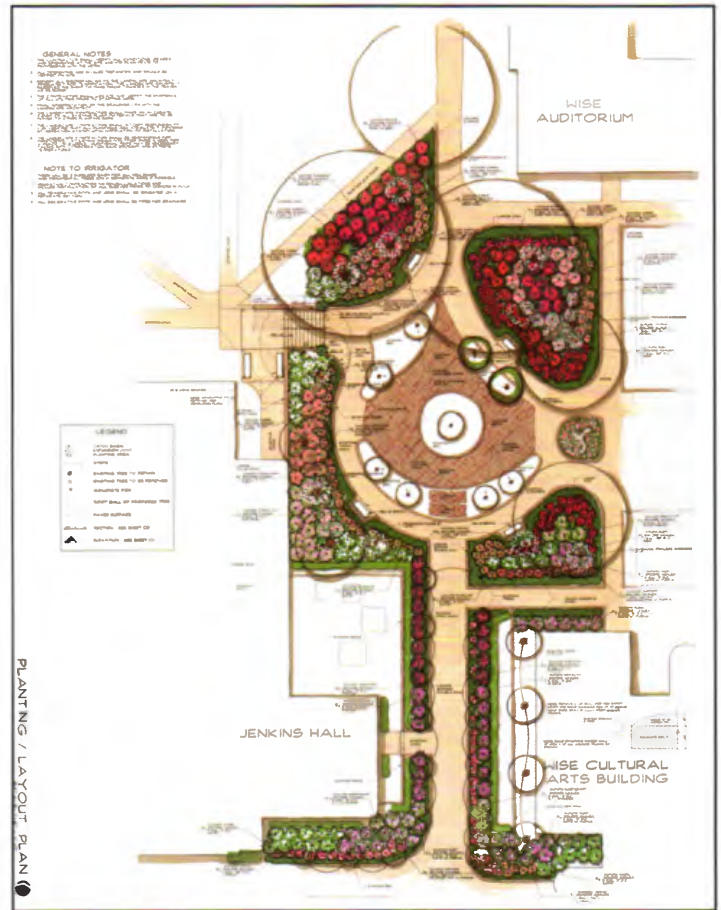


Figure 1. Brundrett Azalea Garden color plan drawing by Burnett and Partners, Inc. (Figures 1 and 2 used by permission.)

ment and not enough spaces to make it useful. Because of her role in local garden clubs, Brundrett was asked to serve on a committee to decide what to do to make this area of the campus more beautiful. The committee members realized immediately that if they planted a rose garden, they'd be forever overshadowed by the Tyler Rose Festival, and so they chose to focus on the other blossoms that Tyler is known for, azaleas. Brundrett was instrumental in raising the funding for the garden, and it bears her name today. It was completed in 1995.

### Impact of the TJC Master Plan

Gardens on a campus like TJC are never simple propositions. The funding must be raised from private sources—a challenge for any garden planners. In addition, the area

must serve several purposes at once. In the case of the TJC botanical projects, each garden is to be attractive to both students and campus visitors, provide educational opportunities to horticulture and science classes, and facilitate both easy passage through the campus and serve as enjoyable special event spaces. TJC's Master Plan, formalized in 2001, does not skimp on the importance of botanical areas, and the \$3.3 million series of gardens that is planned will fulfill all of these missions.

The entire multi-garden project required the guidance of a professional landscape designer, and through the generous gift of the late James F. Gatewood, TJC was able to secure the services of nationally renowned landscape architect Naud Burnett, president of Burnett and Partners, Inc., as well as founder and CEO of Casa Flora, Inc. Burnett is the creative force behind The Dallas Arboretum's Margaret Johnson Garden; Palmer Ferndell and Trammel Crow Visitors Center; the Pittsburg, Texas, home of Mr. and Mrs. Lonnie Pilgrim; and the Gardens at Cheekwood Botanical Garden in Nashville, Tennessee. He has won many prestigious national and regional awards and excels in designing gardens that include a strong educational component. He was perfect for the task.

There are inherent challenges in improving an existing garden. What stays? What goes? How does the new design integrate into the overall Master Plan plan for the college? Each issue was carefully weighed, and plans and renderings brought Burnett's vision to life. (For examples, see Figure 1, Brundrett Color Plan and Figure 2, Brundrett Azalea Garden Elevation.) A special "high tea" was held to give garden enthusiasts a first look at the plans for the Brundrett Azalea Garden and the other six gardens on the TJC campus. "Lunch and learn" events laid out the plans



Figure 2. Brundrett Azalea Garden elevation drawing by Burnett and Partners, Inc.

and captured the scope of the projects. It was quickly evident that having one creative landscape architect spearheading the entire project would give the various gardens essential continuity in both appearance and purpose.

### New Plantings and Embellishments

The original Brundrett Azalea Garden featured a small circular garden area with brick steps leading up into the

heart of the garden. Steve Brainerd, past president of the Azalea Society of America, designed the plantings. The azalea varieties available at the time included only those that bloomed in the spring. Ornamental trees augmented the azaleas for added color. Four raised lawn areas that contained minimal plantings, and therefore held great potential in the new design, surrounded the garden. There was no seating in the garden.

"We felt that the existing azalea garden's plantings and pavement should be preserved," Burnett said. "However, we wanted to expand it into adjacent areas to create more planting beds, new steps to the upper campus commons, and add ornamental trees such as dogwoods (*Cornus florida* 'Cherokee Princess' and 'Cloud 9') and Japanese maples." A *Liriope* border runs as a *leitmotif* throughout the garden beds, and low limestone walls echo the trim of the classic red brick buildings that make up the campus. Recessed benches are scattered through the garden to create unimpeded traffic flow through the area. Seasonal color is sprinkled through the beds and featured in newly added urns placed atop two stairwell columns. Like an artist gently applying background detail to a painting, Burnett sought supplemental plants and furnishings that would highlight the azaleas, never overshadow them.

"The new azalea beds incorporate nearly an entire collection of new varieties of hybrid Encore™ azaleas, which bloom more than once a year," said Naud Burnett. Since this is one of the first such gardens in north Texas where all of the currently available varieties of Encore™ azaleas are located, the garden is now a delightful one-stop display that homeowners can observe throughout its long growing season—and it is sure to attract visitors to the campus. Many of the chosen Encore™ varieties are of deeper jewel tones and will contrast well with the paler shades of existing azalea plants. "It is planned that as new varieties are introduced they will be incorporated into future plantings," Burnett said.

Besides expanding the garden into the raised lawn areas, the plans also call for lining walkways between adjacent campus buildings with colorful azalea displays, thus creating an entrance into the Brundrett Garden from the front of the TJC campus. Mixing varieties in each bed and along walkways brings depth to the roster of plantings and visual interest for the visitor. Each of the four raised beds contains ten or eleven varieties in harmonious splendor, along with the augmentation of ornamental trees and seasonal color.

### Community Support has been Critical

The Brundrett garden is a labor of love for many area garden clubs. District III of Texas Garden Clubs has been instrumental in the successful funding of the project, including Azalea Garden Club, Gertrude Windsor Garden Club, Pionette Garden Club, the Tyler Garden Club, and Tyler Area Council of Garden Clubs. In each case, individuals and clubs have made major gifts to the project, with some "adopting" a bed (paying for the planting of it) or a display of ornamental trees, while others sponsored benches.

What about the toughest audience of all? "I think the landscape architect did a great job," said Ina Brundrett. "I'm eager to see the new varieties in bloom. Most of the homes on the Azalea Trail have older plantings, and this will give people the chance to see some newer varieties." As a member of the TJC Botanic Garden Advisory Committee, her work is far from over, though. She's keen to raise enough funds to handle maintenance, the addition of new varieties as they become available, and care of any plantings that need replacement over time.

The official opening of the Brundrett Azalea Garden is timed to coincide with the annual Azalea Trail celebration in the spring of 2006. During the Azalea Trail, people come from all over Texas and beyond to enjoy the incredible profusion of azaleas that decorate every nook and cranny of Tyler and the surrounding communities. With its banquet of new plants, the Brundrett Azalea Garden at TJC is going to attract a lot of attention and traffic.

"We're so pleased by the community response to this project," said Mitch Andrews, TJC Foundation director of principal gifts. "Our Master Plan for the College calls for each of the themed gardens to bring people to the campus, whether they be students, visitors looking for beauty, or area residents who wish to get involved in building Tyler through its community college. These gardens would not be possible without the enthusiastic support of the people of Tyler and the surrounding area. The educational value of the botanical gardens can't be overestimated, and seeing Naud Burnett's vision literally coming to life here on campus in the Brundrett Azalea Garden makes us all the more anxious to move ahead on the other gardens. It's truly a living legacy that the community is building at TJC," he said.



Groundbreaking photo caption. Participating in the August 10, 2005, groundbreaking for the expansion of TJC's Brundrett Azalea Garden were members from area garden clubs, who provided much of the funding for the project. Pictured (from left) are: Annette Findley and LaVerne Gollob, The Tyler Garden Club; Dr. William R. Crowe, TJC president; Maymerle Brown, Gertrude Windsor Garden Club; Ina Brundrett; Linda Whetsell, Texas Garden Clubs, Inc., District III; Linda Dyer, Tyler Area of Council of Garden Clubs; Mitch Andrews, TJC director of principal gifts; Arlene McReynolds, Pionette Garden Club; and Anne Brown, Azalea Garden Club.

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Encore™ azalea varieties added to the Brundrett Azalea Garden include 'Autumn Amethyst', 'Autumn Angel', 'Autumn Carnation', 'Autumn Carnival', 'Autumn Cheer', 'Autumn Chiffon', 'Autumn Coral', 'Autumn Debutante', 'Autumn Embers', 'Autumn Empress', 'Autumn Monarch', 'Autumn Princess', 'Autumn Rouge', 'Autumn Royalty', 'Autumn Sangria', 'Autumn Starlight', 'Autumn Sunset', 'Autumn Sweetheart', and 'Autumn Twist'.

## New Members

*The following members joined the Society as of December 6, 2005.*

### At-Large

Morris A. Knutsen  
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Volume 27, 2005

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"Azaleas Can Be Very En-deering." Jonathan Kays. 10-13.  
"Azaleas in Brazil." Gerson Borges. 17.  
"The Best Deciduous Azaleas for Hot Climates." Will Ferrell. 6-9.

Book Review: *Success with Rhododendrons and Azaleas* by H.E. Reiley. Eve Harrison. 9, 15.  
"A Capital Adventure-Joint ASA/ARS Convention May 12-15, 2006." Don Hyatt. 76-79.  
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