

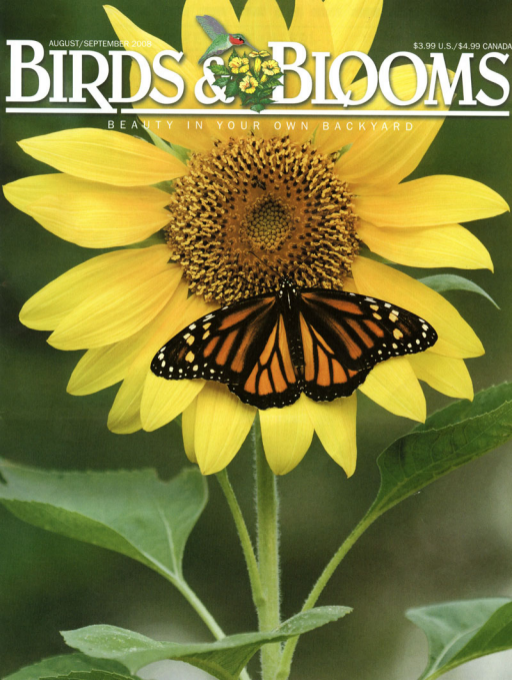
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BIRDS & BLOOMS



BEAUTY IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD



Water Delight

Discover a flowering oasis in this dry Texas town.

By Diane and William Lyell
Abilene, Texas

You don't expect to find a water garden oasis amongst a world of prickly pear cactus and an area that has yearly battles with drought. But that's exactly what you'll discover in San Angelo, Texas.

Civic League Park is the home to the first International Waterlily Collection in North America. The International Waterlily & Water Gardening Society certified it in 1993, and 15 years later, there are only three other gardens like this in the country.

This extraordinary water garden has no admission fee. In the park, you'll find six huge pools of waterlilies that are nestled at the bottom of a shallow pioneer-era rock quarry. Walkways down to the area are gently sloped and lined with flowers that attract butterflies.

Blooms range from petite to plate-sized with everything from rounded to sharply pointed petals. Lily pads come in shades of green, plain or striped, and with edges that are smooth, saw-toothed or ruffled.

You might find other waterlily gardens that are bigger, but it's a challenge to find one as diverse. Civic League Park has more than 150 species, making each one a treasure in itself.

So how did this fabulous collection of waterlilies get started in western Texas? Back in the 1930s, Civic League Park had a long reflecting pool for roses. Roses don't like humidity,

though, so by the 1960s, most people forgot about the plants and pool altogether. It became a boggy mess.

That's when park director Jimmie Rogers approached Ken Landon, who was growing waterlilies for the University of Texas. The two men made a deal.

San Angelo would provide the pools, and Ken would fill them with his extraordinary waterlily collection. From then on, the park's historic pool became the anchor for the evolving water garden.

Building a Collection

When it comes to gardening, Ken Landon isn't what you'd call a weekend hobbyist. People refer to him as the "Indiana Jones" of waterlily collectors, and he's one of the International Society's top hybridizers.

He travels the world and its jungles in search of native waterlilies. After decades of collecting, Ken's results are spectacular. The current six pools in Civic League Park reflect only 5% of Ken's entire collection, which represents 90% of all the world's known species.

As an example of his collection's reputation, an Egyptian of-



Learn more about the wonderful world of waterlilies. This subscriber-only story is available at www.birdsandblooms.com.



BEAT THE HEAT. Most people think of San Angelo, Texas as a city surrounded by drought, not a cool, water-filled destination. If you venture downtown to Civic League Park, however, you'll soon discover an array of waterlilies floating in massive pools.

ficial called Ken a few years ago to ask if he had any Sacred Blue Lily of the Nile (*Nymphaea caerulea*).

The lily dates back to the time of the pyramids but was vanishing from its Egyptian habitat. Ken assured the official he had the Sacred Blue. Three weeks later, Egyptian officials arrived in San Angelo to collect millions of seeds to repopulate the Blue Lily on the Nile River.

Despite Ken's international accolades, his goals for the Civic League collection remain modest. He simply wants people to get excited about waterlilies.

Discover a Cool Oasis

As I relaxed in the shade of an old Pecan tree, I heard the pounding of children as they raced down the walkways to the pools.

"Where's the garbage can lid lily?" one of them shouted.

I laughed. They could only be talking about Victoria (pictured above), the famous South American waterlily with a pad that can grow up to 8 feet across.

For the record, the collection has three varieties of these "garbage can" lilies on display. This is only the beginning.

though. Go ahead and make a trip to San Angelo to see them for yourself. It might just look like a hot and dry area at first glance. But there's a cool water oasis hidden within.



Moon
Dance



Victoria



Albert Greenburg



Larissa Racine



Spontanea



Arc-en-Ciel



Aquarius



Indiana

IF YOU VISIT... Civic League Park is on North Park Street in downtown San Angelo. The season starts at the end of April. In September, there's an annual waterlily fest (Saturday, September 6 this year). The best time to view the blooms is between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. Admission to the garden is free, and it's open 24 hours and lighted for viewing nighttime bloomers. For more information, call 1-325/657-4279 or visit our Links section at www.birdsandblooms.com.



San Angelo