

Edisto Memorial Gardens



Edisto Memorial Gardens, Orangeburg, SC

By Ellen Vincent, Clemson University Environmental Landscape Specialist

The City of Orangeburg is the rose capital of South Carolina. Orangeburg's population of 12,000 is dwarfed by the annual 600,000 visitors that pilgrimage to Edisto Memorial Gardens. The Gardens boast 4,800 roses repre-

senting 120 named varieties. These roses provide aesthetic pleasure and a great deal more. Award winning roses from the All-America Rose Selections are grown here and the site is an official test garden for new hybrid roses.

It also contributes to the American Rose Society's Award of Excellence program that identifies the top miniature and miniflora roses in the US. On-going trials provide the nursery industry with valuable performance feedback. The

area's high disease pressure and hot/humid growing conditions are daunting for many rose species, cultivars, and varieties. Organizations and rose growers from all over the world watch what happens in Edisto Memorial



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Gardens-because if it grows well in Orangeburg it certainly holds promise for other hot and humid climates.

The gardens began in the late 1920s as an azalea collection. To extend the bloom time roses were added in the 1940s. The gardens have always been free and open to the public and have always been owned and maintained by the City of Orangeburg. The City showed its wisdom when they hired Jay Hiers as Superintendent of Parks and Recreation. Hiers is a Landscape Architect with a degree from Louisiana State and strong working relations with the rose industry. He serves on the Boards of several regional and national rose societies.

Noisette roses are a star attraction in the gardens. These old roses were first developed in Charleston, SC between 1802 and 1814 at the rice plantations of John Champney and Phillippe Noisette. Noisettes at Edisto range in size from 3' to 30' tall. The large ones are laughingly referred to by Hiers as "house eaters." The Noisette Project provides trellises for noisettes at the ends of established rectangular beds. Kordes roses from Germany are being tested to determine their disease resistance in a high pressure area. No pesticides are applied in order to test their natural resistance. The miniflora rose "Edisto", with small red blossoms, received the Award of Excellence from the American Rose Society in 2008.

There are 33 acres of developed gardens so be sure to give yourself some time to wander. There are five acres of azaleas, mostly indicas, and miles of well-maintained boardwalk through the wetlands. This walk does include plenty of bald cypress dripping with Spanish moss and sporting elaborate knee architecture. The memorial aspect to this public park is visible in the statuary and the permanent signage. A fountain at the entrance honors those who gave their lives in World War I and World War II, Korean War, and the Vietnam Conflict. The Angel of Hope statue is a tribute to children who have

passed. The Sensory Garden honors the blind by offering rich scents (e.g. rosemary and gardenia), sounds (water falling), and tactile delights (*Muhlenbergia* and smooth stone edges to raised beds).

Another on-site amenity is Centennial Park, a split level plaza with a large working fountain and an amphitheater that seats 250. This space hosts festivals and outdoor concerts featuring theatre, music, and dance. Centennial Park is also the site of the Edisto Rose Festival, a venue that attracts local, regional, national, and international audiences. During the Rose Festival this space is packed with food and arts and crafts vendors, a children's carnival, and musical performances. The Edisto Rose Festival is always held the first weekend in May.

Orangeburg Parks and Recreation Department employs 24 people. Twelve people tend the display gardens. Ten individuals have worked with the department for over 10 years. Hiers believes workers stay interested and satisfied because the work is dynamic and changing, not stagnant. New roses are introduced each year, new techniques are implemented and trialed, and new ideas are constantly being considered. The next garden on the drawing board is an ecofriendly Children's garden that also tests roses. Innovative practices include applying seaweed extract as fertilizer and using a natural biopesticide to thwart disease. A Harpin protein (available as Messenger®) is being applied to some roses to produce resistance to black spot. Harpin triggers an immune response reaction in the plant that makes it resistant to a wide range of fungal, bacterial, and viral diseases. In essence, the plant thinks it is being attacked so its natural defense responses are activated. Because Harpin does not interact directly with disease pests, pest organisms are not expected to develop resistance to it. The EPA fact sheet on Harpin also states that Harpin has also been effective at reducing selected insect infestation and has enhanced growth, vigor,

and yield in many crops (http://www.epa.gov/opp00001/biopesticides/ingredients/factsheets/factsheet_006477.htm).

Jace Johnston was an intern with Orangeburg Parks and Recreation this summer. He is a 5th year landscape architecture student at Clemson University. Johnston was surprised by what he found at Edisto Memorial Gardens. "Growing up in Bamberg I always knew the Gardens as a spot for older people. It amazes me how great this place is" he says. Johnston believes that the key to employee satisfaction at Edisto Memorial Gardens is low-maintenance garden design. Drip irrigation efficiently delivers water to the root system of the plants and ample signage exists for successful self-guided tours.

Johnston's internship project has been to redesign an exercise trail that continually floods when it rains. The mulched surface has not worked-as the mulch moves when the rains come. His solution is to use a PolyPavement material. A liquid soil solidifier is applied to the soil surface then compacted to create a surface reputed to be as strong as asphalt or concrete. He selected this material due to its long lasting performance and its hard surface. "You can skateboard on this surface" he reports.

In addition to the Edisto Memorial Gardens the City of Orangeburg Parks and Recreation Department also tend 150 acres of landscaped areas. This acreage includes numerous passive parks and 10 miles of street trees. Driving through downtown Orangeburg is an aesthetic treat due to well-mulched trees and palms; plenty of curb cuts for tree planting space and groundcovers; and tastefully restored historic storefronts. The Pecan processing facility that borders the garden serves as a reminder that the agriculture industry is integral to a diverse and healthy economy. The Edisto Memorial Gardens are testimony to the power of City, plants, and people.