

A photograph of a landscaped stream with large rocks and a green lawn in the background. The stream flows through a garden area, with large, flat rocks creating a natural-looking barrier and water flow. The water is clear and reflects the surrounding greenery. The background shows a well-maintained lawn and dense trees, suggesting a park or golf course setting.

Rock Quarry Garden

Greenville, South Carolina

*By Ellen A. Vincent
Clemson University Environmental Landscape Specialist*



Rocks and water are natural attractions. Add really big rocks, rock ledges, rock stairs, and a stone bridge and the space is irresistible. Add a 20' tall waterfall, pretty flower gardens, and sumptuously smooth patches of green turf and you have a spectacular event lawn reminiscent of Tolkien's Rivendell. The steep rock and forested edges reach high and provide a protected space that smothers noise and screens most urban aspects. The gathering spaces in the bowl of the garden are too small for huge crowds, and being on McDaniel, a residential street in Greenville, it's a bit off the beaten track for most casual tourists. So who benefits from this landscape? People celebrating picture perfect moments and neighborhood families. And of course the unsuspecting driver-by who pulls off to have a closer look.

The Rock Quarry Garden is a premier wedding site in Greenville. Every weekend the city park is booked for a wedding or a photography session. This constant use has affected the maintenance of the space. It is high profile so it is well tended. Scott Drayton, Superintendent of Grounds for the City of Greenville calls the Rock Quarry Garden, "The hidden treasure of Greenville." Even though it is high profile, the overall ambiance is one of natural beauty and simplicity. Drayton explains, "We try to keep it simple and basic down here, native plants like azaleas and dogwoods are the backbone of the garden."

The Rock Quarry Garden is located on the site of a pre-Civil War granite quarry. The quarry was abandoned and in 1930 the newly formed Garden Club of Greenville led a restoration effort to create beauty. The Garden Club entered the project in a Better Homes and Gardens city beautification contest and won second place in the national competition. The Garden Club still cares for the garden today, as do local neighbors; but with ample support from the City of Greenville Parks and Grounds Department's Beautification Division.

Scott Drayton credits two employees Joey West, Supervisor; and Avery Doolittle, Motor Equipment Operator, for the maintenance of the Rock Quarry Garden. These two men, according to Drayton, "Are extremely hard working and self-motivated. They take great pride in what they do. Their maintenance is immaculate." He also notes that the two get along very well together and excel as a team. This is quite important at the most photographed of the City's 535 sites (excluding Falls Park which has its own maintenance team). Weeds, dead plants, and stressed turf are practically non-existent thanks to West, Doolittle and their team of volunteers who are intent on creating a setting for the perfect picture.

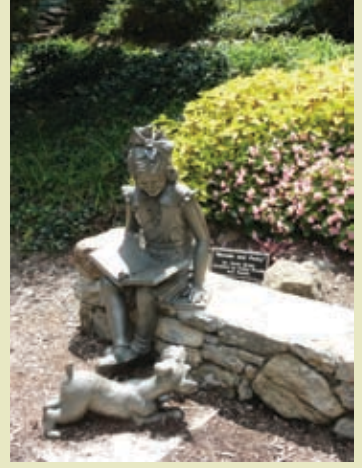
The water that flows through the center of the garden starts as a spring upstream. After spilling over the rock ledge at the waterfall it evenly divides the sunny side from

the shaded side of the garden. Fescue Titan is the grass of choice on the shady side and Bermuda 419 grows on the sun side. This Bermuda is the standard for golf course greens and sports fields so will hold up to heavy use. The lawns are aerated three to four times each summer and a pH test is completed each year. Easy care flower beds full of perennial daylilies, dianthus, caladium, rudbeckia, and echinacea as well as annual coleus, petunias, and celosia ensure summer color after the azaleas stop

flowering. Due to the close proximity of water very few pesticides or herbicides are used in this garden. West and Doolittle primarily hand weed. The turf is mown with a push mower due to narrow stone entrances on all sides. Slow release nitrogen fertilizers such as Osmocote are used to protect the stream from nutrient run-off and leaching.

Drayton says the space is unusual due to the granite. There is only a thin slice of soil available for plants to grow in.





Mature water oaks, red maples, sycamore, spruce, magnolia and deodar cedar create desirable shade but are watched carefully by the crew and their certified arborist for signs of decay. Soil is occasionally carried in when the layer becomes too thin or flower beds are being reworked. Mulch is essential to this garden as it creates organic matter when it breaks down, restoring the soil level. Mulch is applied by hand to the flat levels and application is contracted to an outside company to be blown onto the steep banks that edge all sides of the Rock Quarry Garden.



Another challenge for the Rock Quarry Garden is drought. The older trees are showing signs of stress and a replacement plan calls for natives to be used when the time comes for replanting. This garden has an automatic overhead irrigation system that has to be turned on manually, yet some parts still have to be hand watered. West and Doolittle make sure the plants are properly irrigated in order to meet customers' events needs, yet are sensitive to the need for water conservation that is required of all residents and establishments. Drayton just shakes his head while talking about the drought. This summer he schedules a water truck to operate seven days a week in order to keep plants alive throughout the city.

An average of three to four e-mails cross Drayton's computer regarding the Rock Quarry Garden each week. No, these aren't complaints; 99.9% of the time they lavish praise on the well tended beautiful garden. He credits the City's mayor and the City Council for their high regard for green space plus the highly committed grounds crews he works with for Greenville's success at creating outstanding parks for people. The new high end condominiums above the Rock Quarry Garden are testimony to the economic power of green space.

Scott Drayton truly enjoys the multi-tasking that comes with his job as Superintendent of Grounds. He graduated in 1996 from Clemson University with a degree in horticulture though his education started long before that in his father's plant nursery. His father is Tom Drayton, co-owner of City Nursery Farm in Bishopville. After graduation Drayton went to work for a golf course to indulge his passion for turf grass. He also held a part time job with Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) doing survey work along the way. Ending up working for a municipality seems natural to the versatile worker.

He has learned that success involves listening to other people and learning from them, especially his staff. His assistant, Drew Smith is a certified arborist who keeps the city from committing many of the tree crimes that occur in other municipalities. Deep planting practices are routinely controlled by staff locating root flares prior to planting. Compaction and girdling issues are continually prevented due to this arborist on staff. Jordan Franklin, Park Manager at Falls Park, (see *SC Nurseryman* magazine Jan/Feb 2008) is the herbaceous plant expert Drayton relies on, and of course Drayton mentions his father as a resource, "My dad is a very good teacher", he claims. Clemson professors David Bradshaw (emeritus)

and Ted Whitwell also had a positive impact on Drayton's career. Drayton became a Certified Nursery Professional (CNP) five years ago. This is a certification program for professionals sponsored by the SC Nursery and Landscape Association (SCNLA).

Scott Drayton keeps nine crews in constant motion within the City of Greenville and is confident the taxpayers are getting their money's worth. His praise for the crews is strong and clear, "[They] are very hard workers, they listen and care about their work. I am nothing without these guys, I may be the glue, but they keep things happening."

The picture perfect Rock Quarry Garden sometimes surprises the men and volunteers who tend it. In 2004 Drayton reports that a microburst delivered 10" of rain within two hours. The quarry filled up with water and became a deep pool for awhile. After each flood, they reposition the rocks that have shifted. Joey West keeps his trowel handy due the number of cars that mysteriously collide with the stone wall on the perimeter of the garden during nights and weekends. And no, McDaniel Street is not a particularly curvy, fast road. Trash is minimal here and Drayton claims, "The cleaner we keep it, the fewer problems we have." Strategically placed gray boxes dispense bright

blue bags to allow dog walkers to clean up after their pets.

Although the Rock Quarry Garden features native plants, it also represents the cultural heritage of the people who have used this place. English ivy (*Hedera helix*) and vinca (*Vinca minor*), are non-natives that were planted long ago on the steep banks. These plants stabilize the soil and prevent the erosion of soil into the water. Bamboo is planted along one side of the waterfall. The black stems are dramatic and exotic in this natural southern landscape and the plants are encased by stone, therefore aren't spreading to other parts of the garden. Statues of children are located in the garden, gifts from significant donors. A memorial tree, a trident maple, is planted to honor Brian Bruce, a fellow employee who died in 2007.

"This garden," explains Drayton "represents a natural area that has evolved over many years. It's really a cultural landscape- everybody has a little piece of this place- the garden clubs, the neighbors. We let it be, and add maintenance and color. It's always been this way." So, if you are looking for the perfect natural landscape to be the background for your special photographic moment, feel free to contact the City of Greenville to reserve a day, just for you, at the Rock Quarry Garden.