



UNITED STATES BOTANIC GARDEN

NATIONAL GARDEN

AMERICA'S NATIONAL GARDEN: A HISTORY

When the National Garden opens to the public on October 1, 2006, it will mark the successful completion of one of the first public-private projects undertaken by the Office of the Architect of the Capitol. The project was solely funded by private donations raised by The National Fund for the U.S. Botanic Garden. This not-for-profit corporation raised \$11.5 million in private contributions pursuant to Public Law 102-229. The National Garden's mission is to educate visitors about the great diversity of American plants and their importance to the environment; to help connect people to nature; and to demonstrate the relationships between plants, water, and humans.

The journey to create this outdoor, living museum officially began in December 1991, when Congress authorized construction of the National Garden to provide visitors to Capitol Hill with a place to experience "the diversity of plants, including the rose, our national flower" (P.L. 102-229). However, the idea of a National Garden had its start in 1986 when Mary Johnston, wife of then-Senator J. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana, worked with the American Rose Society and key legislators to designate the rose as America's national flower. On November 20, 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed Proclamation 5574, declaring the rose as the National Floral Emblem.

Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Johnston rallied additional congressional support, as well as that of congressional spouses including Mrs. B.A. Bentsen and Mrs. Teresa Heinz (wives of Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen and Pennsylvania Senator John Heinz, respectively), to create a showplace for the national flower. The United States Botanic Garden (USBG), located at the foot of Capitol Hill, offered an ideal location and would provide the appropriate stewardship for such a garden. The USBG had its own small rose garden (at the site of the current Hornbeam Allée) and had experience growing roses in the challenging Washington, D.C., environment. The tract of land adjacent to the USBG Conservatory and bordered by Independence Avenue, Maryland Avenue, and Third Street, S.W. also was available as part of Capitol Grounds.

From these early ideas, a plan evolved to create a more complex National Garden on this three-acre site that would include features in addition to the rose garden. In 1988, Congress authorized the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) to undertake such a project. In 1991, The National Fund for the U.S. Botanic Garden (National Fund) was designated to raise funds and contract for the design of the expanded National Garden.

During the early 1990s, a design competition was held for various proposed National Garden elements, including the Rose Garden, the First Ladies Water Garden, and an Environmental Learning Center. A donation from the Heinz Family Foundation helped jump-start fund-raising. In 1994, the National Garden Gala, attended by six of America's First Ladies, attracted national attention and resulted in heightened public awareness of the project.

At the heart of the fund-raising effort were more than 250,000 individuals from local garden clubs in nearly every state. Other individual donors included Members of Congress, former Presidents and First Ladies, and families from across the country. By 1996, the National Fund had recruited Scotts Miracle-Gro, Lowe's Home Improvement, Home & Garden Television, and Ames True Temper to join the Heinz Family Foundation as Founding Sponsors. In 1997, a commemorative silver dollar featuring the rose and the U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory was issued by the

United States Mint. A portion of the proceeds from the coin sales benefited the National Garden. A new feature, the Butterfly Garden, was added to the Garden plans thanks to the sponsorship of the National Garden Clubs, Inc., who mounted their own national effort through the involvement of their affiliated garden clubs.

Fund-raising continued through the late 1990s as the National Garden progressed from concept to construction drawings. The site presented some significant construction challenges, not the least of which is its location over the I-395 tunnel, a critical traffic artery. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks ushered in a new era of security for all the public institutions in Washington, especially those in the vicinity of the U.S. Capitol. To follow newly issued guidelines, redesign of the National Garden's entrances and infrastructure was required.

In 2003, the National Fund faced a critical decision: re-energize the National Garden project and bring it to fruition, or face the alternative. The National Fund opted to make a final effort to complete a garden worthy of its site on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol. Under the new leadership of Leone Reeder and Jim Hagedorn, new board members were recruited and fund-raising efforts were stepped up. The National Fund reestablished clear and effective relationships with its Founding Sponsors and worked with the AOC and the Joint Committee on the Library to address and resolve a number of issues. (The Joint Committee on the Library had been given oversight responsibility for the USBG's originating collection in 1843 and has continued in that role to the present day.)

The National Fund and the AOC worked with project managers of the lead architectural design firm, The Smith Group, to reduce project costs by simplifying and modifying the Garden's design. The parties agreed to contract for a phased construction, beginning with the base bid, which consisted of the Rose Garden, Butterfly Garden, Lawn Terrace, and Hornbeam Allée. Option One, the installation of the landscaped garden path that meanders through the site; Option Two, the Regional Garden and amphitheater; and Option Three, the First Ladies Water Garden, were subsequently added. The National Fund met its fund-raising goals for the additional options due to a donation from a new Founding Sponsor, Deere & Company. Plans for Option Four, the Environmental Learning Center, have been postponed indefinitely.

The contract for construction of the National Garden was awarded to James V. Walsh Construction in March 2004, and construction was completed in September 2006. U.S. Botanic Garden staff were responsible for the planting and landscaping to prepare the site for the official opening on October 1, 2006. The National Garden will continue to grow and mature under the stewardship of the USBG.

The National Garden project is the result of a successful collaboration among the Joint Committee on the Library, the Congress, the National Fund, the sponsors, the contractors, the USBG, and the AOC staff. Not only is the National Garden a wonderful oasis on Capitol Hill, this newest feature of the U.S. Botanic Garden also will be a national treasure for generations to come.