

WOODLAND GARDEN OF MYSTERY, CHANGE, SURPRISE AND REFUGE

Peggy Davis

Wayne Womack was the speaker at Hilltop's first Sustainable Landscape Design Series, a new quarterly adult education program dedicated to improving the environment through courses in landscape design and care of trees and plants. With over 40 people attending, Wayne described the design process he used to create his own residential woodland garden in a presentation titled "***Turning A Forest Into A Garden: 'Enhancing' A Native Woodland.***"

Wayne's talk began with a description of his first impression of the property he's gardened since 1977. He said "I remember standing under a solid, towering canopy of trees and feeling a strong sense of privacy and mystery. The changing light among the trees convinced me that a garden here could be wonderful." With slides of the garden as a backdrop, his design philosophy was revealed. First, he retained the character that originally attracted him to the property – the feeling of mystery, change, surprise and refuge. Second, he created year-round interest yet reflected the native landscape, which is predominately deciduous, with frequent accents of broadleaf evergreens, as well as flowers in subtle colors, mainly white and pastels. Third, he restricted himself to a planting arrangement that would maintain the open character of the site using trees, shrubs and predominately low perennials. Fourth, he created a garden that is relatively undemanding to maintain. He said "I don't like being a slave to weeding, pruning and spraying, and the naturalistic look of the garden spares me most of these burdens." And finally, enjoying the garden is essential.

The second half of the program included a field trip to the woodland garden of Carole and Mark Guillory. The couple began their garden nine years ago when they purchased a lot just north of the arboretum and bordering Bluebonnet Swamp. The property was undisturbed and had never seen a bulldozer. Mark took utmost care to site their home to preserve as many of the large trees as possible. He told Carole they could hand clear the property of undesirable understory plants and Carole couldn't believe it could be done. But during the year it took to build their home they worked to do just that. In the spring of 1999 they consulted with Marion Drummond, then Hilltop Site Director, who convinced them they could create a woodland garden. Marian was an inspiration to the couple and an amazing teacher recommending trees, shrubs and perennials to plant. Marion left for Biloxi in late 2002 and without her help it was obvious that the couple had to learn more about plants and plant care. In 2003 Carole became a certified Louisiana Master Gardener. Ten years later all of the protected trees have survived and flourished – including several American Beech trees that were less than ten feet from the house. Carole and Mark say it has been a wonderful 9 years and the garden continues to be a work in progress.

For a list of Wayne Womack's and Carole and Mark Guillory's favorite trees and plants which you can use to create your own woodland garden, visit www.lsu.edu/hilltop. Many of the trees and plants are available for sale at the Hilltop Hodge Podge Nursery seven days a week.



Pictured above from left to right: Marian Drummond, Carole Guillory and Wayne Womack at the woodland garden of Carole and Mark Guillory.