

# 'Oklahoma Gardening' greens up Orange Country

Episode by episode, "Oklahoma Gardening" has brought the seeds of knowledge to fruition throughout the state.

The how-to gardening television program puts a fun twist on gardening and brings Oklahoma State University research, education and extension into living rooms all across Oklahoma and surrounding states.

"'Oklahoma Gardening' encourages Oklahomans to use the available information to enhance their gardening abilities as a way to improve their quality of life," said Ray Campbell, former "Oklahoma Gardening" host.

More than 175,000 viewers from Oklahoma and surrounding states tour the garden each week without leaving home. They get a glimpse of the possibilities they can create in their own backyard from the comfort of their living rooms.

"Visitors can see what they can actually do for themselves," said Laura Payne, "Oklahoma Gardening" studio garden manager. "Just like everyone else, our plants may have problems, and we seek answers just like they do. There's no magic involved."

"Oklahoma Gardening" started in 1975 when the Oklahoma Educational Television Authority network asked OSU for assistance in producing a seasonal gardening series.

With no formal sets, "Oklahoma Gardening" literally got its start in the backyards of Oklahoma. After taking plants

to the OETA studio in Oklahoma City for several years, "Oklahoma Gardening" moved into the backyard of host and extension horticulturist Ray Campbell.

"It's grown into something bigger, better and more useful," said Kevin Gragg, "Oklahoma Gardening" producer and director.

Through a partnership among the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, the OSU Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture and OSU Agricultural Communications Services, "Oklahoma Gardening" is produced, tying horticultural education to learning and sharing with the public.

"The support of the Division of Agriculture enables us to have a lot of freedom," said Gragg. "Every week we get to take the university to the people and show them research-based information that they can benefit from."

Steve Owens brought his know-how from behind the scenes as studio garden manager into the spotlight, becoming the ninth host of "Oklahoma Gardening" in 2001.

"We try to convey the most helpful, interesting information through our experience and the research done here," said Owens. "We keep working to make the show better."

Since the state's climate and geography changes drastically from one side to the other, "Oklahoma Gardening" accommodates the varying gardening practices throughout the state.

"It's truly a program for the benefit of the people of Oklahoma," said Gragg.

Nearly 80 percent of the programs are taped at the studio gardens; however, "Oklahoma Gardening" incorporates feature segments from areas such as Guymon and Southeastern Oklahoma where there can be variations in gardening.

"Though gardening is one of the top hobbies in the U.S., gardening in Oklahoma is unique because of the climatic transitions from one side of the state to the other," said Owens. "Although it can be challenging, I wouldn't want to garden anywhere else."

The studio garden at the Oklahoma Botanical Gardens and Arboretum in Stillwater, Okla., sets the stage for the weekly tapings of "Oklahoma Gardening."



*Above: Sue Wright (left) Oklahoma Gardening Ambassador, demonstrates to Steve Owens (center) and Kevin Gragg how Oklahoma gardeners can add terra-cotta friends to their own gardens. Right: "Cassius Clay" and his "terra-collie" enjoy the serenity and beauty of the Oklahoma Botanical Gardens. (Photos by Kristen Andrews)*

The 3-acre studio garden flourishes with permanent and theme gardens. The permanent gardens feature a striking collection of plants and include a water garden, bog garden, rock garden, children's educational garden, herb garden, butterfly garden, model railway garden, Japanese ceremonial tea room garden, an orchard and various perennial plantings.

The theme gardens change seasonally to meet gardening trends and public interest. Current gardens include a pepper garden, vegetable garden, weeping garden, prehistoric garden, bamboo garden, petunia garden, Japanese garden and patio garden.

"People don't realize what's actually out here," said Payne. "It's definitely one of those hidden secrets. It's just beautiful."

The studio garden, as well as the OBG, is open to the public Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., except Wednesdays when it is closed for taping. The OBG Ambassadors offer guided tours on the first and third Saturdays of every month.

The OBG Ambassadors are a volunteer group that helps the garden flourish.

"Without volunteers, the OBG and 'Oklahoma Gardening' wouldn't be nearly as successful," said Campbell, who now serves as an OBG Ambassador.

More than 30 volunteers assist with the planting, pruning and promoting of the studio gardens.

"They all have their own niches and creativity to add to the garden," said Payne.

The OBG Ambassadors aren't the only ones who get down and dirty. OSU students use the studio garden and the OBG as another learning resource in addition to their textbooks.

"There is quite a bit of student involvement," said Campbell. "It's really a hands-on teaching tool."

Serving as an outdoor laboratory, the gardens enable learning to extend beyond the classroom for many students. In addition, many students are involved in internships that give them real-world experiences. From the upkeep of the studio garden to assistance with video production, it's the student involvement that helps keep "Oklahoma Gardening" rolling smoothly.

"It's been a really good experience," said Autumn Nolting, horticulture and landscape architecture major and OBG intern. "I'm getting a head start on things I'll be doing for the rest of my life."

With more than 27 years of success, "Oklahoma Gardening" will only continue to grow.

It is tied with the New England-based "Victory Garden" for the longest consecutively running program of its kind.

From irises to insects, the show covers everything today's gardener needs to know. Shape your shrubs, pot your petunias or transplant your trees with the "TV you'll grow to love" on OETA stations Saturdays at 11 a.m. and Sundays at 3:30 p.m.

"I can only see 'Oklahoma Gardening' continuing to increase in popularity and success if it stays with its mission of being a practical, educational, hands-on program for the viewers, as well as continuing to change and adapt as it has in the past," said Campbell.

*By Kristen Andrews, Hudson, Colo.*

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