

NARRATIVE

WILDFLOWER CENTER OVERVIEW

BY

RON GEORGE and OTHER STAFF

1. Title slide - The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center is pleased to present “A WILDFLOWER CENTER OVERVIEW.”
2. May I ask how many of you have visited the Wildflower Center? The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center is located in South Austin at the intersection of MoPac and La Crosse Avenue. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center is a national conservation organization and a Texas native plant botanical garden. All of the plants you will see at the Wildflower Center are Texas native plants. Our mission is “Inspiring the Conservation of Native Plants.”
3. Just what is a native plant? The Wildflower Center defines a Texas native plant as a plant that grows naturally in Texas (and was growing here prior to European settlement). This black-footed daisy is a native plant well adapted to Central Texas limestone and granite soils.
4. Some Texas native plants have been around for a long time. The brown-colored fossil on the left is a horsetail plant embedded in Permian-age sandstone. It was found on a ranch near Brownwood (in north-central Texas). It is around 250 million years old. The green plant on the right is a modern horsetail that grows in wet areas throughout Texas. You can see the horizontal nodes (or joints) and vertical striations on both plants. Horsetails look something like bamboo but are millions of years older.
5. Conifers (including cypress and pines) have been around for 200 million years.
6. Flowering plants, as we know them, have been around about 100 million years. Magnolias (which grow in East Texas) haven’t changed much since that time. As you may recall, the dinosaurs disappeared 66 million years ago, but Texas native plants are still around.
7. Today, there are over 5,000 species of native plants in Texas.
8. Every one of these Texas native plants has a story to tell. Yaupon holly, which is an forest understory species throughout the Southeastern United States, is unique in the U.S. in that it has caffeine in its leaves. If you pick green yaupon leaves, place them on a cookie sheet in an oven at 350 degrees for 20 minutes, crumble up the leaves, and brew up a cup of tea, you get green tea. If you do the same thing, but this time at 375 degrees, you get something like Lipton’s orange pekoe tea. If you repeat this process at 400 degrees (again

for 20 minutes), you get “black drink.” Black drink was used extensively by native Americans in the Southeastern United States in their religious ceremonies. They drank such huge quantities of black drink that they began to throw it up. Even today, the scientific name of this plant is “*Ilex vomitoria*.”

9. Besides being attractive and having cute stories, what are the advantages of native plants? (See list on slide). Mrs. Johnson used to say, “When I was returning to Austin by air and I could look down and see blue in the pastures below, I knew I was home.”
10. But who was Mrs. Johnson? (See slide).
11. What did Mrs. Johnson and Helen Hays do? (See slide).
12. After the new South Austin tract was purchased, Mrs. Johnson initiated a nation-wide search for an architectural firm to design the new Wildflower Center. Overland Partners of San Antonio was ultimately selected. When the architects asked Mrs. Johnson what she had envisioned for the project, she said, “It should look like God made it.”
13. The new Wildflower Center (which opened in 1995) was spectacular. Everything at the Center has a meaning as well as a function. The brown sandstone structures represent the Spanish mission culture at San Antonio. The precise white limestone structures represent the German Hill-Country influence, and the galvanized sheet-metal roofs represent the farms and ranches of Texas. As we mentioned earlier, the Wildflower Center is a national conservation organization and a regional botanical garden. You will notice we now have 279 acres of land, over 215,000 visitors annually, about 55 permanent staff, and over 750 volunteers.
14. The Wildflower Center was renamed for Mrs. Johnson in 1997 and became an organized research unit within the College of Natural Science at the University of Texas at Austin in 2006. This means permanent staff get their paychecks and insurance through UT but are not funded by UT.
15. Wildflower Center History. (See slide).
16. Center’s Horticultural Program. (See slide).
17. The Environmental Education Program. (See slide).
18. Native plants can solve ecological problems. (See slide).
19. Consulting Program. (See slide).
20. Sustainable Sites Initiative. (See slide).
21. Invasive Plants Issues. (See slide).
22. Threatened and Endangered Native Plants. (See slide).
23. National Outreach. (See slide).
24. National Outreach. (See slide).

25. Mr. Smarty Plants. (See slide).
26. National Outreach - *Wildflower* magazine. (See slide).
27. Volunteer Manager Carrie McDonald says, "This is Camelot." Carrie knows the name of every volunteer and matches each with the perfect job.
28. Professional horticulturalists plan the gardens and supervise volunteers.
29. Volunteers do many things. Some like to garden.
30. Some prepare I.D. signs for plants.
31. Others arrange flowers and work in the Gift Store.
32. Some conduct weekly faunal surveys.
33. Or lead docent tours.
34. Our all-time champion volunteer is "Tall Paul" Reinhartz with over 8,000 volunteer hours. Tall Paul is a retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. and nuclear weapons expert. He is multi-talented!
35. We are currently planning a new front entrance for the Wildflower Center.
36. One of our on-going headaches is the road construction at La Crosse Avenue and MoPac.
37. No presentation would be complete without a discussion of funding. Funding for the Wildflower Center comes from memberships, admissions, donations, grants, and rentals (for weddings and other events).
38. Mrs. Johnson passed away in 2007, but as long as she was able, she was an active participant in the Wildflower Center.
39. I think she would be pleased in the public's continuing interest in the Wildflower Center and Texas native plants.
40. Thank you.