

MERCER

Arboretum & Botanic Gardens

Connecting people with plants

Mercer's hours of operation:

Daily from 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

Note: Mercer's hours of operation are subject to change; please call (281) 443-8731 or visit their website at www.hcp4.net/mercer regularly for the current hours.

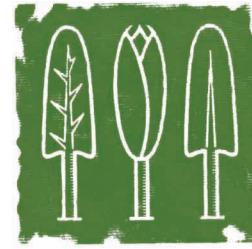
Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, a Harris County Precinct 4 facility under the leadership of Commissioner R. Jack Cagle. Harris County Precinct 4 programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, sex, religion, national origin, or physical ability.

To learn about the many programs and events offered at Mercer, please contact Mercer at (281) 443-8731, or visit their website at www.hcp4.net/mercer.

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R. Jack Cagle, Commissioner



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DISCOVERING THE WORLD OF PLANTS



A Botanical Scavenger Hunt



Today you will become a **botanist**: a person who studies plants. In addition to learning about many species of plants you will also learn about some of the birds and animals that thrive in Mercer’s gardens.

This scavenger hunt begins at the Plaza Fountain and leads you through the main garden loop, bringing you back to the starting point. **Please remain on the paths at all times and do not remove any items from the gardens.**

Follow the brick pathway to the right—the yellow signs lead the way—and use this guide to check off the scavenger hunt items listed in this guide. Enjoy the scavenger hunt and good luck!

Facing the PLAZA FOUNTAIN (the Visitor Center is on your right). Look at all of the water plants (water lilies) to find:

___ 1. **Lily pads.** How do they stay dry and remain floating? The special leaves of water lilies are called lily pads, which are thin and lightweight. They are filled with tiny spaces of air that help them float on top of the water and collect sunlight, and the slick, waxy coating keeps them from sinking. How many water lily flowers are blooming?

___ 2. **Plant signs.** Find a plant sign to learn all about the plant. See the example below:

Family Name (scientific)	Family Name (common)
	Asteraceae Aster Family
Common Name	LIGULARIA
Genus ¹ /Species ² Names	Farfugium ¹ japonicum ²
Cultivar	‘CRISTATA’
Country of Origin	Japan

Together the genus and species names make up the scientific name.

Follow the brick path as it curves; notice the memorial bricks along the edges of the brick pathway. Look to your left to see the “water wall.” In front of the “water wall” you will find:

___ 15. **Thelma’s Garden.** This garden is dedicated to Thelma and Charles Mercer who owned and nurtured the original 14.5 acres of property that is now a small part of over 300 acres that makes up Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Gardens. Thelma loved gardening and some of her plants still grow in Mercer’s gardens. You will see a statue of Thelma with her cat Jinx and gardening tools on your left.

Continue down the brick pathway past the greenhouses (on your left) where Mercer staff and volunteers grow hundreds of thousands of plants each year. On the left is the HERB GARDEN. Enter the curving paths of the HERB GARDEN to find:

___ 16. **A peppermint plant.** Plants are an important source of food, flavorings, spices, and medicine. Can you find any other familiar flavorings or spices in the Herb Garden? Rub your fingers on the leaves and smell your fingers, but please do not pick the leaves of plants in the herb garden.

Congratulations! You have completed the scavenger hunt. We hope you have enjoyed exploring the wonderful world of plants at Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens!

Follow the flagstone path through the stone arch and turn right ► (5A) on the brick path and turn right ► (5B) on the wooden bridge. Cross the wooden bridge and follow the flagstone path to the right ► (5C) toward the stone arch. On your right look down in the edge of the water to find:

___ 6. **Pitcher plant.** The long tubular leaves of pitcher plants were developed to catch insects. When a bug enters the trap (tube), it is forced downward by stiff hairs. When it reaches the bottom of the tube it is digested and used by the plant for food!

Exit the Endangered Species Garden through the stone arch. Turn left ◀ (6A) on the flagstone pathway until you reach a brick pathway. Turn left ◀ (6B) on the brick pathway to find:

___ 7. **A maze.** This living puzzle is made of Southern Yew bushes from Taiwan and Japan. Mazes were very popular many years ago and were even used as secret meeting places for friends or spies. Some mazes were so large that it took hours to find a way out. Walk slowly and carefully through the maze, making sure to stay on the gravel path. Look out for dead ends. Good luck!

As you leave the maze turn right ► (7A) to find a garden in the shape of a giant insect:

___ 8. **Knot Garden.** Flowers can be planted in many decorative patterns. Can you see the outline of a butterfly in the Knot Garden?

Across from the knot garden, boxwood hedges make a rectangular fence. Look in the middle of this garden to find:

___ 9. **A sundial.** Sundials were used long ago to tell time from the position of the sun in the sky. Look at the shadow made by the gnomon (the point in the middle). It should be pointing to the time of day on the disc. But what do you do at night to tell the time?

Exit this garden the same way you came in and turn left ◀ (9A) on the brick pathway until you see white rocks. This is the PREHISTORIC GARDEN: follow it to the left ◀ (9B) to find:

___ 10. **A bunya bunya tree** (also known as a monkey puzzle tree). This area contains the species of plants that lived during the Dinosaur Age. The sharp needle-pointed leaves made it impossible to climb and probably discouraged dinosaurs from eating the tree branches.

Follow the path around the Prehistoric Garden and exit the same way you entered; turn left ◀ (10A) on the brick pathway. You will walk alongside Cypress Creek where the Akokisa (ah-koe-kee-sah) Indians paddled their canoes long ago. Continue on the brick path to the wooden bridge. On the left is the BOG GARDEN. Look right (opposite the pond) to find:

___ 11. **A sweetgum tree.** Sweetgum trees are native Texas plants. Early pioneer children would poke holes in the trunks to collect the sweet, sticky sap to use as chewing gum; which is how it got its common name. Sweetgum trees have star-shaped leaves and grow spiny “gumballs” that protect the seeds until they are ripe. Do you see any star-shaped leaves or gumballs? The leaves are eaten by luna moth caterpillars.

Continue on to the brick path, through an open area. The open area on the left will soon become a butterfly sanctuary. The brick path will lead to the TROPICAL GARDEN where you will search for:

___ 12. **Tropical plants.** The tropical plants in this garden are from three different countries that thrive in tropical jungles around the world. Look in the bottom left-hand corner of the brown plant signs to discover the native country of each plant. Because tropical plants thrive in hot and humid environments, most of these tropical plants are dug up and kept warm in greenhouses during the winter months.

Turn left ◀ (12A) around the tropical garden to the gravel path behind the volunteer cottage (the Mercer family's original home) to find:

___ 13. **A Mexican milkweed plant.** These plants attract Monarch butterflies. Adults sip nectar from the bright orange and yellow flowers and caterpillar babies munch on the leaves which are poisonous to other insects, but protect caterpillars from predators (animals that hunt them for food). Look at the brown plant signs in this garden to learn the kinds of butterflies and moths that visit Mercer's butterfly gardens.

Continue on the gravel path and take the left fork on the brick path through the MEMORIAL FERN GARDEN to find:

___ 14. **Ferns.** Look under the leaves to find little "dots." These dots are spores which produce new plants, instead of seeds. Ferns have lived for a very long time, even before the days of the dinosaurs!

Take the brick path to the right of the Plaza Fountain, past the Color Garden, and enter the GAZEBO to find:

___ 3. **A 16" hummingbird.** (Clue: look down). Hummingbirds often visit Mercer's garden in search of flowers with sweet nectar. Hummingbirds spread powdery pollen from one flower to the next helping plants make seeds, which is called pollination. The nickname for this tile mosaic hummingbird is "Humdinger!"

Follow the brick path straight ▲ (3A) to the stone step on your left ◀ (3B). This is the DRY GARDEN. Follow the flagstone path and on the left find:

___ 4. **Texas ebony.** This is a small tree that is native to South Texas and Mexico and grows in dry environments. Notice all of the thorns on the branches. Why do you think that it has them?

Take the flagstone path to the left of the Dry Garden and enter the ENDANGERED SPECIES GARDEN through the stone arch.

Plants that are endangered are labeled with green signs. See how many endangered plants you can find.

Follow the path to the left ◀ (4A) past the beaver dam and turn right ▶ (4B). Look behind the Sugar Hackberry tree on your left to find:

___ 5. **Florida torreyia.** This plant, that may offer a cure for cancer, is related to the Pacific Yew that is used in a medicine to treat breast cancer. Scientists have not yet discovered all the valuable uses of plants, but the Florida torreyia and the other plants in this garden are in danger of dying out before they can be studied further.