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John Watson: Clark Gardens adds scarecrow trails for October



The entrance to the Historic Tree Trail features corn stalks and scarecrows guarding the entrance. Jeanetta Watson/Special to the Times-Review



The little scarecrow the Texas Traveler dubbed Raggedy Ann. Jeanetta Watson/Special to the Times-Review



The old farmer with his overalls and straw hat. Jeanetta Watson/Special to the Times-Review

The farmer's wife with her sunflower covered shawl and overalls. Jeanetta Watson/Special to the Times-Review

The railroad engineer with a red bandana tied around his neck and an engineer's cap. Jeanetta



Watson/Special to the Times-Review

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The Clark Gardens are located on 35 acres of land a few miles east of Mineral Wells on Maddux Road. On the first weekend in October, they have had a fall festival at the gardens for several years. This year's festival was billed as the "Spiciest Festival Around," complete with a chili cook-off and salsa tasting. However, something new was added this year.

Children and various church and club groups were invited to the gardens the weekend before the fall festival to spend the day making scarecrows. The scarecrows were placed alongside the trails throughout the gardens for the visitors to see. They will be left in the gardens until Halloween.

Over the years, the scarecrow has become associated with harvest time, along with pumpkins, gourds and shucks of corn stalks. Scarecrows were used by early farmers to keep crows and other birds out of their corn and wheat fields. By keeping the birds out of the

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Egypt.

When we arrived at the entrance to Clark Gardens, there were two scarecrows sitting by a bale of hay with pumpkins scattered around them as a welcoming committee as you entered the garden area from the parking lot.

At this point we met Carol Clark Montgomery, who welcomed us to the gardens. When I told Carol that I was mainly interested in seeing the scarecrows she said that I would find them all throughout the gardens and pointed out a trail to start on. She said that I would find the chili cook-off and salsa tasting tent just beyond the model train station.

As we left to start our tour we heard music playing and nearby was a Mariachi Band playing. This was a roving Mariachi Band and we met them at several locations on our tour of the gardens.

The second scarecrow we spotted was dressed like a girl with a big sunflower in her hair and skinny legs, she almost reminded me of Raggedy Ann.

A little farther on we spotted the old farmer with his overalls, long sleeve work shirt and straw hat. Nearby was the farmer's wife wearing a shawl covered with big sunflowers and also wearing a pair of overalls.

Near the model train station was a scarecrow dressed as an engineer. He had on overalls, a blue chambray work shirt, a red bandanna tied around his neck and a striped engineers cap.

By the time we arrived at the train station we had walked a half mile or more wandering around through the gardens and were ready to rest a bit. There are benches in the station where you can sit and watch the trains come through. There are two miniature towns laid out here, one representing Weatherford and the other representing Mineral Wells, with miniatures of some of the early buildings from each town. They have more than 1,200 feet of track running through this area of the gardens with the trains coming through the station and stopping at the miniature depots. I guess you never get too old to enjoy watching the trains.

Near the train station is the Historic Tree Trail with an arched sign over the start of the trail with corn stalks tied to the posts on either side of the trail, and a scarecrow by each post with pumpkins and bales of hay around them.

From here we went to the large tent where they were having the salsa tasting. There were several vendors selling their own salsa variety. Next to this tent was the chili cook-off.

From here we headed back to the entrance, looking for more scarecrows on the way.

I was surprised at the number of flowers still in bloom. One plant really caught my attention. This was a large bushy type plant with large white lily shaped blooms. I remembered my grandmother having a flower like this by the corner of her house back in the 1940s. My grandmother had called it a Moon Flower.

I looked around the bed until I located a name tag for this flower; it was Jimson Weed, otherwise known by some ranchers as Locoweed, because it makes their livestock act crazy when they eat it. All parts of the plant are toxic and some of the psychological effects on

humans include confusion, euphoria and delirium.

At the entrance I told one of the ladies working there about seeing the Jimson Weed that my grandmother had one by her house more than 60 years ago which she called Moon Flower. The lady paused a bit, smiled and said, "I think I like Moon Flower better

The scarecrows will be left in the gardens through October.

From 4-8 p.m. Oct. 31, Clark Gardens BOOtanical Park will become a marvelously fun place for kids of all ages to enjoy Halloween. The BOOtanical is also the time when the gardens participate in a community-wide food drive benefiting local, area food banks.

Bring a nonperishable food item as a donation and receive free admission to the Halloween festivities on Oct. 31 at Clark Gardens.

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