

11.2.11

Meet a Master Gardener

To get a first-hand look at a totally evolved Elementary School permaculture garden, I visited with George Hixson, who is parent volunteer coordinator and Master Gardener at Travis Elementary in the Heights. When you talk with George amidst his magnificent, educational, all-volunteer green creation, he exudes such pride in his accomplishment, and of course he ignites my imagination with all the elements of his vision that have either become reality or are in the early stages of becoming realized soon.



George Hixson in his garden at Travis Elementary School.



There are thirty seven garden plots surrounding the work cabin.

George is a professional photographer who in recent years has devoted his weekday mornings to overseeing and creating the Travis Garden, which now includes thirty-seven garden plots (one for each teacher in the school), a natural habitat, a butterfly garden, a compost area, a built-on-site cabin, gorgeously bricked and pebbled walkways, a gulch for a future swamp, an amphitheater, a large pond under construction (for gambusia fish—a Texas native fish that eats mosquitoes!), and an impressive irrigation system. All that has gone into creating this wonderland was put together by volunteers, in addition to a

recent grant from the Hershey Foundation plus considerable interest on behalf of Houston's Urban Harvest organization.

I picked up a lot of great ideas, naturally, during my visit with George. He likes to trim his plots with 8 X 8 X 8 cement blocks—they are easily movable, and they are indestructible, and as I noticed the kids love walking on them. I liked George's answer to my question about whether kids wear gloves: "I don't want them wearing gloves. Kids need the experience of getting their hands dirty in the garden."



Travis students love the garden work—here, they are doing some weeding.

Everything about the garden is about self-sufficiency, even down to the water pump he is now constructing for the waterfall that will fill his gambusia fish pond—he'll be powering the pump with

solar panels! There is also a sense of full circle involvement for Travis students, who will grow their herbs in the fall and winter, and then in the springtime they have “Chef Night,” where the kids will prepare bags of herbs for sale at two bucks a piece, with all proceeds going back into running the garden.



George Hixson shows his progress on the pond he is constructing for gambusia fish.



Each garden is assigned to a teacher.