

Floral Throughways

Garden Clubs Help Beautify Roads

Displays of flowers populating highway meridians, road embankments and adjacent green spaces are often due to the efforts of garden clubs working with state departments of transportation (DOT). Some of these pioneers also inspire other clubs to pursue similar collaborations, often with public support.



"The people of Texas have joined wholeheartedly in what Lady Bird Johnson started," says Linda Love, roadside beautification chairperson of the Texas Garden Clubs, Inc. (TexasGardenClubs.org), headquartered in Fort Worth. Their committee recognizes planting projects on state and county highways assisted by 320 local clubs encompassing about 10,000 members.

She points to particularly attractive areas along highways 75 in Richardson, plus highways 45 and 35 extending south of Dallas, where concentrations of blue bonnets "look like lakes," says Love. Other planted native flower patches include Indian paintbrush and gaillardia. She notes that the state prohibits mowing of blue bonnets until after they've bloomed and dropped their seeds; picking rules preserve their beauty.

Gail Hill, chair of The Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc.'s (ffgc.org) roadside beautification committee, based in Winter Park, reports the Ella P. Wood Paths of Sunshine Award Program that partners with the Florida Wildflower Foundation (FlaWildflowers.org) recognizes the efforts of state DOT maintenance crews in establishing and maintaining roadside wildflowers. "The department has run a strong program for decades," she says.

Local clubs are encouraged to petition elected officials for new resolutions to develop roadside wildflower projects. "About half of Florida's counties have passed resolutions, including most recently, Santa Rosa and Escambia counties," says Hill.

This year, the Raleigh-based The Garden Club of North Carolina, Inc. (GardenClubOfNC.org), with more than 200 chapters, is working with the state DOT to commemorate the centennial of America's entry into World War I by planting red poppies and bachelor buttons. Roadside Development Chairperson Pat Cashwell reports that about 1,500 acres of wildflowers, including cosmos, are planted annually on state and county highways each summer and fall, largely funded by the sale of special license plates, with awards to highway department crews. "We get letters from people after they drive through the state commenting on the floral beauty," she enthuses.

Many garden clubs also establish flowers in parks, schoolyards, church properties and other public locations.