

Restoring the Historic Charlotte Hilton Green Park

Our project is restoring a small inner-city park that once belonged to famed conservation author and early Raleigh Garden Club (RGC) member Charlotte Hilton Green. The land was donated to the City of Raleigh in the late 1980's in honor of Charlotte. But it had been sadly ignored and neglected since that time.

The park is a narrow strip, mostly wooded, along Crabtree Creek. At the southern tip, a two-level lawn is bordered by striking specimen trees, bulbs, and shrubs Charlotte planted.

Our goals were to restore the crocus lawn and to clear out the invasive plants on the hillside along the entrance steps.



1- A map of the Charlotte Hilton Green Park in Raleigh

Planning for Planting Led to an Archaeology Find

Planning for the workdays to accomplish our goal involves cooperation between the project chair, Laurie, and Raleigh Dept. of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources (Parks Dept). Together we ordered over 200 spring bulbs –“Tommies” (*Crocus tommasinianus*) and 50 of the native Dwarf Crested Iris (*Iris cristata*) – to restore the crocus lawn. We also ordered 200 daffodils for along the perimeter of the park entrance.

We knew from verbal history – a neighbor who grew up when Charlotte still lived there - that the crocus lawn was a spring highlight. Planting so many bulbs in scattered groups of 3 per hole was a labor-intensive activity. But it was rewarded by an “archaeology” discovery! We found a flagstone path that had been smothered by the turf over the decades. It led across the lawn and back towards the creek where there was still a remnant of a bench. The flagstones were massive! Easily 10 inches thick! As we uncovered them, this garden feature was still powerful enough to conjure their magic, beckoning you into the garden.



2 - The Crocus Lawn in summer before discovering the flagstone path (left), crocus and iris as they will look in spring (middle) and naturalizing daffodils along the park border

The second goal was to open up the entrance steps which were nearly obscured by rampant English ivy and many tree seedlings and invasive Japanese honeysuckle growing on the hillside. The steps themselves have been dislodged by time. We lopped, chopped, pulled, and dragged off the invasive vines and small trees – piling them into the park truck to be carried away for composting. The daffodils were planted along the perimeter of the park, on either side of the cleared entrance steps, so they would be visible to those walking or driving by. These were planted in drifts to maintain a natural look. Charlotte was not a fan of “formal” gardens.



3 - The steps before and after we cleared the invasive growth

Teamwork and Sweat Equity Restore a Historic Park

Once the schedule of workdays – 2-3 each in spring and fall – had been settled on, they were announced in our newsletter, with sign-up sheets at the Club meetings for up to 10 members to work on any given workday.

The limit on numbers was due to the Raleigh Parks Dept. COVID requirements. We also invited some of the local neighbors of the park to join in, because Laurie, our chair, lives near the park and they knew her.



4 - Workday at the Park - getting organized

The Raleigh Parks Dept. funded this project, and RGC provided the sweat equity.

The transformation of this neglected park back into an inviting garden again was our most rewarding accomplishment. What had looked like a weedy, overgrown, and neglected lot in this lovely residential neighborhood was once again a beautiful spot, and in the spring with the crocus lawn in bloom it will turn quite magical.

Connecting with one of our Club’s early gardening pioneers in spirit, and restoring a part of her garden, gave us all a deep sense of place. Charlotte was likely the first ever Raleigh gardener to set up a garden specifically as a wildlife habitat. She was ahead of her time! The camaraderie developed between our Club and the Parks Dept staff was mutually rewarding and follows a GCNC and Club goal of cooperating with like-minded organizations for civic improvement and historical preservation.

