

City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department



Inspiring Austinites of all ages to learn, play, protect, and connect with public natural spaces.

Nature-Based and Science Programs

Natural places enrich and benefit all of us. Exploring nature and playing outside with family and friends improves health, happiness, and well-being. The Austin Parks and Recreation Department offers diverse nature-based and science programs that teach outdoor skills, nature preservation, and wildlife appreciation. Several groups within the department serve to engage the community and spark interest in science and nature, with programs, services, and volunteer opportunities tailored to all ages and abilities.

The Lorraine Camacho Activity Center specializes in adventure programming for all ages, including mountain biking, kayaking, rock climbing, filmmaking, nature photography, and more.

The Austin Nature & Science Center offers indoor and outdoor exhibits featuring artifacts, nature trails and live animals, and provides environmental science education programs to schools and the community. The site hosts homeschool groups, family events, environmentally-focused camps, and adventure programs.

The Beverly S. Sheffield Education Center houses the *Splash! into the Edwards Aquifer* exhibit, rotating exhibits that highlight the importance of water quality and conservation, and partners with the Austin Nature & Science Center to offer educational programs such as the *Splash Lab* and *Incredible Insects*.

The City of Austin Park Ranger program provides educational services, safety, and security in Austin's parks and recreational facilities. Rangers are the primary ambassadors for the *Leave No Trace* campaign, which aims to educate the public about responsible and sustainable recreation. Rangers also offer *Observational Art* classes, *Reading with a Ranger*, and guided hikes.

Zilker Botanical Garden features themed gardens such as the Taniguchi Japanese Garden, the Hartman Prehistoric Garden, Rose and Herb Garden, Butterfly Garden, Children's Garden, and more. Available docent tours and programs, and regular plant shows and sales provide opportunities to learn about plants and gardening in Central Texas.

Addresses and contact information:

Austin Park Rangers
Zilker Caretaker Cottage
2105 Andrew Zilker Road
(512) 978-2600
austintexas.gov/parkrangers

Austin Nature & Science Center
2389 Stratford Drive
(512) 974-3888
austintexas.gov/department/austin-nature-and-science-center

Green School Park at Barrington Elementary Schoolyard



Beverly S. Sheffield Education Center
2201 William Barton Drive
(512) 974-6350
austintexas.gov/splash

Lorraine Camacho Activity Center
35 Robert Martinez Jr. Street
(512) 978-2420
austintexas.gov/camacho

Zilker Botanical Garden
2220 Barton Springs Road
(512) 477-8672
austintexas.gov/zilkerbotanicalgarden

Cities Connecting Children to Nature

Adults who enjoy and care for the natural environment invariably trace it to pivotal childhood experiences playing in natural settings. Beyond simple pleasure and ensuring the next generation of Austin's environmental stewards,

outdoor play in nature can foster children's intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development. Yet not all children in Austin have equitable access to nature, with disparities correlated with racial and economic lines. The *Cities Connecting Children to Nature* (CCCN) is an initiative within the Parks and Recreation Department that seeks to eradicate that disparity. Established in 2016 as one of seven cities nationwide selected to receive a \$25,000 grant, a three-year implementation plan is now being fulfilled.

The planning process included extensive research and mapping to identify areas of Austin with the largest gaps in nature equity, which was used to inform the following strategies:

- Green School Parks – Establish a network of “school parks” that provide garden-based education and nature play that integrates with the school's curriculum. Green School Parks have been established at Barrington Elementary and Wooldridge Elementary, with more planned.

- Program and Park Activation –In partnership with the Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center and the Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin, align nature-based programs with available park space in neighborhoods of need.

- Public Awareness Campaign – Inform residents on the importance of regular nature access for overall healthy development through a searchable online tool and social media.

- Policy Development – Enact nature access policy initiatives for inclusion in Austin’s development code and city department master plans.

For full detail, please visit: austintexas.gov/page/cccn-about

Community Gardens Program

The Community Gardens Program was created by Austin City Council in 2009 to establish a single point of contact and streamline the process for establishing community gardens on city land. The program helps neighbors with all aspects of garden permitting and installation, including initial land permission, building permit, site plan exemption permit, water tap access and water meter installation, and license agreement. The City now has 27 community gardens on City land, for a total of 68 community gardens in the Austin area overall.

In conjunction with the Sustainable Food Center, the Community Gardens Program provides staff support for the Coalition of Austin Community Gardens. Their Web site (communitygardenaustin.org) is an excellent resource for Austin-area community gardeners, including a dynamic garden directory map. For more information on the Community Gardens Program, call 512-974-9450.

Resilience Hubs

Over the past decade, resilience has become a popular

term within the environmental science and sustainable design fields. Whether applied to an ecosystem, community, or building, resilience is the ability to respond to a disturbance by resisting damage and recovering quickly. During the summer of 2018, the Parks and Recreation Department hired an Environmental Defense Fund fellow to study the establishment of a resilient shelter in one or more recreation centers. Dove Springs, Givens, and Gustavo Garcia Recreation Centers were selected for the study due to their location in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Extreme climatic events—such as floods and excessive heat—have a more detrimental impact on low-income communities. They are often located in vulnerable areas such as floodplains, have lower quality construction materials, are unable to afford regular maintenance for existing infrastructure, and have limited resources to escape, withstand, and recover from such an event.

These three recreation centers have previously served as shelters during flood recovery periods due to the following attributes:

- They are located near, but safely out of the flood zones;
- The adjacent neighborhoods are already accustomed to using the centers for various services;
- The facilities possess the desired physical qualities for size; layout; food preparation, storage, and serving; restrooms and showers.

To qualify as a resilient shelter, it needs to be equipped with a solar photovoltaic system and battery storage so that it can provide the necessary services during an extended grid outage due to flood, extreme heat or other reasons. The 2018 study explored options and costs for adding that equipment to the three sites, in addition to an initial financial analysis.

The Parks and Recreation Department will continue to work with other city departments to explore options for creating resilient shelters in its recreation centers, whether with existing facilities or as an additional function for newly-built or renovated recreation centers.



Shelter set up at Dove Springs Recreation Center after the October 2013 Onion Creek flood