

THE GARDEN

EXTRAORDINAIRE

SPRING 2026



HOUSTON'S GARDEN TRADITION

Spring in Houston is unfolding in luminous layers of pink, white, and magenta as azaleas continue their graceful seasonal display. Following the beloved [River Oaks Garden Club Azalea Trail](#), a cherished Houston tradition for nearly a century, the beauty of azaleas carries forward across our neighborhoods in gardens both grand and intimate. From the pristine white blooms of G.G. Gerbing to the vivid pink Judge Solomon and the stately magenta tones of Formosa, these Southern classics reflect a horticultural legacy deeply rooted in our region. For generations, azaleas have been shared among neighbors and cultivated with care, becoming part of the living history of our city and its gardens. At McDugald Steele, it remains our privilege to steward gardens shaped by these traditions, where each bloom reflects thoughtful cultivation, horticultural expertise, and a lasting respect for place.

CARE + COLOR SPOTLIGHT

SPRING GARDEN CARE

This seasonal overview is intended to provide a thoughtful understanding of the essential practices that guide the garden through spring. While each garden responds in its own way, the Garden Management team is giving careful attention to timing and methods to achieve enduring health and beauty.

MARCH

RENEWAL AND PREPARATION

- Gentle shaping of groundcovers and ornamental grasses to encourage fresh growth
- Careful observation of shrubs and garden structure as the season begins to unfold
- Lawn aeration and balanced seasonal fertilization
- Application of fresh mulch to moderate soil conditions and retain moisture

APRIL

GROWTH AND REFINEMENT

- Measured pruning and shaping to maintain form and balance
- Selective thinning to support air movement and healthy development
- Nutritional support for groundcovers and ornamental plantings
- Mulch replenishment to prepare for rising temperatures

JUNE

EARLY SUMMER STEWARDSHIP

- Seasonal lawn fertilization to sustain warm season turf
- Review of irrigation performance and plant vitality
- Light mulch refresh to protect roots and conserve moisture



AZALEA NOTES & NOTIONS

ROOTED IN RIVER OAKS

Azaleas became a defining feature of Houston gardens in the 1920s and 1930s during the early development of River Oaks, helping shape the city's signature spring landscape. According to the Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens at the Museum of Fine Arts - Houston, Ima Hogg began experimenting with azaleas at Bayou Bend in 1930. After ordering several Omurasaki azaleas through Teas Nursery and amending the soil with peat moss, the plants thrived, prompting her to order 250 more the following year.

NATURAL SHADE GARDENERS

Azaleas thrive in filtered light and beneath tree canopies, making them perfectly suited to Houston's shaded residential gardens.

REMARKABLY LONG LIVED

With proper care, azaleas can flourish for decades. Many mature plantings in Houston's historic neighborhoods continue to bloom year after year.

DESIGN+BUILD SPOTLIGHT

THE HOTEL DAPHNE

CREATING & CONSTRUCTING A BOUTIQUE HOTEL GARDEN EXPERIENCE.



McDugald Steele recently completed the exterior garden installation for the Hotel Daphne, bringing the landscape vision for this boutique hospitality destination to life. Located in Houston's historic Heights neighborhood, the hotel blends contemporary hospitality design with the character of the surrounding community, offering guests a refined place to stay, gather, and dine.

Our firm was engaged to design the hotel's exterior grounds, including the arrival sequence, parking areas, and a central courtyard garden that now serves as the heart of the property. From the moment guests arrive, the landscape establishes a welcoming sequence that highlights the hotel's façade. The planting palette was carefully selected for Houston's climate and supported by integrated irrigation and lighting

systems that ensure the gardens perform beautifully throughout the seasons.

At the center of the project is the courtyard garden, anchored by a century-old live oak that became one of the most important design considerations on the site. Protecting the health of the tree required a highly technical paving solution developed in collaboration with structural engineers at SCA Engineers.

Rather than installing conventional paving that would compact soil and damage the tree's root system, the courtyard was constructed using a suspended paving system. Steel posts were drilled into the ground and connected with structural angles to support a layered assembly of sheet metal, concrete, and pavers. The system is supported by helical piles and creates air flow beneath the paving surface, allowing the tree roots to continue receiving the air and water necessary for long-term health.

Prior to installation, arborists conducted spade tests to locate major roots so structural supports could be adjusted accordingly. Drainage and irrigation were also integrated around the tree to maintain

DESIGN+BUILD SPOTLIGHT (CONTINUED)

proper moisture levels beneath the paving. Additional trees on the property were protected through similar strategies. In areas where walkways pass close to root zones, paving transitions to decomposed granite rather than concrete. This approach minimized excavation and avoided cutting into the root systems, preserving the long-term health of the trees.

Anchoring the courtyard is a custom fountain that introduces the calming presence of moving water while providing a visual focal point. The fountain’s design was inspired by a historic reference discovered in Architectural Digest. After tracing the original piece to a foundry in Ireland that is no longer in operation, the design team studied the proportions and recreated the fountain through custom fabrication.



THE SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR THE COURTYARD'S SUSPENDED PAVING.

Today, the courtyard functions as an extension of the hotel’s social life. Guests dining at Hypsi, the hotel’s Mediterranean-inspired restaurant, can step outside to enjoy the courtyard patio, where additional seating allows visitors to socialize and relax within the garden setting.

Beyond the courtyard, the landscape transitions to an enclosed event lawn designed to accommodate larger gatherings. This space will integrate with the hotel’s future event hall and outdoor amenities planned for the second phase of the development, anticipated in 2027.



THE COURTYARD'S SUSPENDED PAVING ALLOWS THE CENTURY OAK ROOTS TO BREATHE AND THRIVE.

Bringing the first phase of the project to life required coordination across several disciplines. McDugald Steele implemented the installation of the planting design, landscape lighting and electrical systems, irrigation infrastructure, and the courtyard fountain, ensuring each element works together to support the landscape and guest experience. The project represents a collaborative effort with an outstanding team including Bunkhouse Hotels, Blanchard A+D, Darwin McCredie Architect, Rio Grande Organics, and Forney Construction Group. Together, the team delivered a landscape that balances technical precision with hospitality-driven design and creates a garden environment where architecture, landscape, and preserved trees shape a memorable experience for Hotel Daphne guests.

SPRING EVENTS

NOTEWORTHY EVENTS ACROSS HOUSTON'S GARDEN & DESIGN COMMUNITY

A TEXAS-SIZED CELEBRATION

INSTITUTE OF CLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE & ART MEMBER CELEBRATION

The ICAA Houston Chapter will host its Houston member celebration on March 26, 2026, from 5:30–7:30 PM at Authenticus. The evening will celebrate 20 years of ICAA Texas and the 10-year anniversary of the John Staub Awards, which recognize excellence in classical architecture and design. Guests to enjoy wine, light bites, raffle and projections of past award-winning projects. Those interested in learning more about the organization are welcome to attend. Learn more about the event at: <https://classicist-texas.org/event/houston-member-celebration/>

BAYOU BEND WEEKEND

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS HOUSTON

One of Houston's most cherished garden traditions at Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens, with Bayou Bend Weekend taking place March 27–29, 2026 and the Bayou Bend Garden Party on the evening of March 29, 2026. Join us in honoring the beauty, heritage, and community spirit that define these events — full details are available at <https://www.mfah.org/visit/bayou-bend>.

RESTORING LIFE TO OUR LAND

ORGANIC HORTICULTURE BENEFITS ALLIANCE

The Organic Horticulture Benefits Alliance will host Science Day on Friday, March 27, 2026, at the United Way of Greater Houston. The program will feature regenerative agriculture educator Nicole Masters presenting “Restoring Life to Our Land,” exploring biodiversity, soil health, and regenerative solutions for more resilient landscapes. Learn more and register: <https://ohba.app.neoncrm.com/np/clients/ohba/event.jsp?event=111&>

EVENING IN THE PARK

HERMANN PARK CONSERVANCY

Hermann Park Conservancy's annual Evening in the Park gala will take place on Thursday, April 30, 2026, along McGovern Lake in Hermann Park. This elegant spring evening brings together Houston's philanthropic and design communities in support of the continued care and stewardship of one of the city's most treasured public landscapes. Learn more about the event at: <https://www.hermannpark.org/support/evening-in-the-park/>

CONTINUE...

SPRING EVENTS

NOTEWORTHY EVENTS ACROSS HOUSTON'S GARDEN & DESIGN COMMUNITY

DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS

THE GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA

“Deep in the Heart of Texas” Flower Show is taking place on April 8, 2026, from 1:00–5:00 PM at the Lora Jean Kilroy Visitor and Education Center at Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens. Open to the public, the show will feature floral design, horticulture, photography, and botanical arts, while honoring the resilience of Texas Hill Country communities impacted by the 2025 Kerr County floods and celebrating a shared appreciation for plants, gardens, and the natural world. Learn more about the event at: <https://www.gcamerica.org/flowershows>

TEXAS DESIGN WEEK

HOSTED BY PAPER CITY MAGAZINE

Texas Design Week Houston will take place April 13–16, 2026, with panel discussions and showroom events held at design venues across the city. The week brings together leading voices in architecture, interiors, and design for conversations exploring creativity and craftsmanship. Learn more and view event details: <https://texasdesignweek.com>

BLAST OFF HOUSTON! FLOWER SHOW

THE GARDEN CLUB OF HOUSTON

“Blast Off! Houston, we have a flower show” a GCA Flower Show is taking place on April 22–23, 2026, at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Houston. The show will feature floral design, horticulture, photography, and botanical arts exhibits, celebrating creativity and horticultural excellence within Houston’s gardening community. Learn more about the event at: <https://www.gchouston.org/blast-off-houston/>

BUILDING FOR THE AGES

INSTITUTE OF CLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE & ART

On Wednesday, April 29, 2026, from 5:30–8:00 PM, the Institute of Classical Architecture & Art Houston Chapter will host “Building for the Ages: A Discussion on Excellence in the Traditional Craft” at Segreto Finishes. This panel-style discussion will explore the value of craftsmanship and traditional building methods within architecture and design. Guests will have the opportunity to engage with industry professionals while enjoying an evening of centered on the principles of timeless construction and classical design. Event details and are available at <https://classicist-texas.org/event/building-for-the-ages-a-discussion-on-excellence-in-the-traditional-craft/>