



Garden News

Notes from the Director By David Creech

I've concluded that one of the great perks of semi-retirement is traveling. Since the last newsletter, I've been a traveling fool, with trips to China, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and spots here and there in Texas. My month-old brand new just-off-the-showroom floor truck has over 5000 highway miles under its belt. I call these trips part of our goal to spread the SFA Gardens' world to as many folks as we can.

One of the high-spot trips since the last newsletter would have to be leading a group of SFA faculty and spouses to Nanjing, China (October 19-26, 2008). The purpose of this mission was to develop a long-term collaborative agreement that will support faculty and student exchanges and cooperative research ventures between Stephen F. Austin State University and Nanjing Forestry University (NJF). NJF is one of the premier universities in China and boasts approximately 21,000 undergraduate students, with 7000 undergraduate and 2000 graduate MS and PhD students, and over 200 faculty in the College of Forestry and Environmental Science. NJF Vice Presidents Xue Jianhui and Chao Fuliang hosted the SFA delegation's stay and

enlisted the help of a wide range of faculty members whose talents matched those of SFA's faculty. Dr. Daniel Norton, Director of International Programs, brought a Memorandum of Understanding signed by SFA President Baker Patillo. Each of the SFA faculty members presented a seminar to the faculty and graduate students, met with prospective students, toured university nurseries and forestry experiment stations, met in discussion groups with like-minded Nanjing Forestry University faculty and enjoyed a busy week of exceptional hospitality.

In this treadmill of one activity to the next, I've had an epiphany. Actually, I was kind of forced into it. At our last SFA Gardens Board of Advisors meeting, Barbara Wagner implied that I had become a curmudgeon. I wasn't exactly sure what that

meant so I looked it up and found that a curmudgeon is a "crusty, ill-tempered, and usually old man." That hurt. So, with that verdict ringing in my head, I've embarked on my very own personality improvement program. I will no longer see children as dangerous little people stomping in my flower beds. Instead, they are now happy kiddos in an outdoor setting gaining valuable education and insight into the green garden world. My wonderment at the antics of the Little Miss Silly Princess Tea Party is over. In the past, I raised questions about the educational value of this gathering of prissy gals. That is over. I've given up on all that and embraced the whole thing as a great way to connect kids, moms, dads, and grandparents to our plant-driven world. Hopefully, this new and improved version of Dave Creech will stick. Until next time, keep planting.



*Seated: Lily Guan, Janet Creech, and Theresa Coble.
Standing: Dave Creech, Hu Haibo, Ric Berry, Debbie Berry, Melody Davis, Joe Ballenger, Linda Yeiser, Jimmie Yeiser, Dave Kulhavy, Daniel Norton, Yin Yunlong, Matthew McBroom, and Gary Kronrad.*

Name That Plant for Azalea Trail

By Barbara Stump

Photos of the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden project were featured in the recent *Texas Public Gardens* book (by Elvin McDonald and photographed by Kevin Vandivier). What a joy that was! There was a fabulous two-page spread showing the trail I call Wisely Walk to honor our donor. In the foreground was Bed 20, which is full of a lovely double salmon pink and white Pericat hybrid azalea called 'Hampton Beauty'. This is also peeking out among camellias in Bed 19.

While we know that lots of our visitors just love to walk around the garden during the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail (March 14 through 31 this year), there are others who really want to know the names of our plants. Thanks to the membership 2008 campaign we have funds to begin the monumental task of permanently and legibly labeling our plant collections in all three SFA Gardens. Over the past several weeks, Azalea Garden Volunteer Sherri Randle has helped learn how to run the new Randall

Epilog laser machine, and we are trying to catch up to Dawn's plant labeling that was begun last summer. We began creating labels for the camellia collection and have now moved over to the main groups of azaleas that our Azalea Trail tour groups will see on their tours between March 18 and April 16. Volunteers Don and Bonnie Orr helped stick labels in correct spots, and this activity continued during the Saturdays that the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden is featured during the Azalea Trail (March 14, 21, 28). So now you, too, will be able to name that plant.

The March 21 Azalea Symposium featured companion plants for azaleas: both Dawn Stover's talk on perennials and Elizabeth Mundy's talk on using Japanese Maples in the landscape. Since Elizabeth has donated Japanese maples for us to evaluate in sun and she grafts over

400 varieties, she was a very good choice to lead a grafting workshop dedicated to Japanese maples.



Rhododendron 'Hampton Beauty'

Exceptional Azaleas—the Encore Azalea® Collection

By Barbara Stump

Over the past several years, we have been trialing the Encore Azaleas. The oldest in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden are in Bed 13 near the ROTC tower. Planted in 1999, our initial set of six varieties is reaching mature height at 4-5 feet. The history of these azaleas is closely linked to one of our Azalea Society of America friends, Robert "Buddy" Lee of Louisiana. Buddy spoke at our first Azalea Symposium in 2003 and was president of the ASA from 2004 to 2007, which was the year the SFA Mast Arboretum hosted the annual national ASA convention in Nacogdoches.

Back to a little plant history: In the early 1980s Buddy Lee, a plant breeder and azalea "enthusiast," noticed some azaleas that bloomed beyond the typical spring season. One of these was a rare evergreen azalea from Taiwan, *Rhododendron oldhamii*. He crossed this with spring-blooming evergreen azaleas. By 1997—helped by PDSI (Plant Development Services Inc.) in selecting and testing—the first 12 cultivated varieties of Encore Azalea® came on the mar-



Encore Azalea - Autumn Sundance™

ket. Buddy and PDSI have continued to turn to the SFA Mast Arboretum and the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden as places to display and evaluate their new plant material. By 2008 the Encore Azalea® collection included 23 patented varieties ready for release to the market. PDSI donated the entire collec-

tion for planting in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. We have planted them in a highly visible area—Bed 44 and 45 near the western side of the garden, by the parking area and two benches—for maximum enjoyment. There is also a sign interpreting the collection. Grown by a network of select wholesale nurseries across the US, they are sold in retail nurseries nationwide and here in Nacogdoches.

True to their name, Encore Azaleas bloom vigorously again and again—spring, summer, and fall—in a lively palette of bright jewel tone pinks, roses, salmon, or burgundy colors or sparkling white. After spring flowering, new shoots and buds form to bloom from summer until frost. This raises two common questions: When should I prune them? As with any typical evergreen azalea, prune right after bloom. Yes, you could prune after a fall bloom, but not too much or too near our first frost date. When should I fertilize them? After the first spring bloom should be enough.

Mechanically Challenged—No More!

By Elyce Rodewald

Recently Dr. Craig Morton, Ag Mechanics professor, and two of his most amazing students took on a daunting challenge—to take eleven mechanically challenged gardeners and turn them into savvy garden tool mechanics.

We didn't think it could be done in a short, three-hour garden seminar, but Dr. Morton, John Clayton Carter and James Mills worked wonders. We learned about different grades of oil, how to change the oil in our lawnmowers, how to sharpen various garden tools, keep our tires from going flat, and the finer points of



Nancy Snoberger hones her sharpening skills under the watchful eye grad student James Mills

starting a weed-eater and sharpening a chain saw. Throughout the seminar, exclamations of “I never knew that!” and “Now I understand why...” could be heard throughout the Ag Mechanics Shop.

Sherrie Randall, SFA Mast Arboretum Volunteer and workshop participant, was particularly excited about what she learned, “KUDOS! One of the most informative, useful seminars I've attended. Great info and nice guys! You might consider a ‘back by popular demand’ fall class. Let word of mouth get around, especially in the country...gotta be a winner.”



2009 Garden Seminars

July 11: Taking Care of Your Turf Grass with Jeff Abt. Learn how to create and maintain a beautiful lawn in our East Texas climate. \$20 members. \$25 non-members

November 13 and 14: How to Identify and Attract a Flock of Backyard Birds with Cliff Shackelford. Enjoy a Friday evening lecture about bird identification and common local birds. Then rise and shine early Saturday morning and take a leisurely stroll to the Shackelford home to visit their backyard that is “for the birds.” Binoculars available for first-time birders. \$20 members \$25 non-members

December 12: Deck the Halls: Using Evergreens to Decorate for the Holidays with Dawn Stover. Join us for this wonderful Arboretum tradition and learn how to make a holiday wreath and magnolia garland. Attend this seminar and you can't help but get into the Christmas spirit! \$20 members \$30 non-members.

Workshops are held from 9 am – noon in room 118 of the Agriculture Building unless otherwise noted.

Contact erodewald@sfasu.edu or call 936-468-1832 for more information or to register.

Landscaping is for the Birds

By Greg Grant



Ever since I've been gardening, I've been attracted to the idea of landscaping. There's something therapeutic, almost magical, about taking a neglected or abused piece of property and turning it into something beautiful. There was a time in my life when just making the landscape beautiful was enough, but no more. A truly great landscape should first be environmentally sound and sustainable. If it requires more chemicals than you can survive, then it's not worth it. Also, if it requires more labor than you can afford or contribute, it's not worth it either.

But that's not all there is to landscaping. There are those wonderful, potential bonus caveats like edible produce, fresh cut flowers, beautiful butterflies, and of course those intriguing birds. I was raised with people that thought landscapes were places to park your cars or to graze your livestock. It wasn't long before I surrounded myself with people that thought landscapes were there to personally make their lives more beautiful. Most of my friends now consider their landscapes to be an important fashion statement. I once did, but the older I get (I was going to say, "more mature", but that ain't happening!) the more I realize landscaping is for the birds!

I've always been fascinated by the variety of birds we are blessed with in Texas. Some are beautiful, some sing wonderful tunes, and some are just interesting to watch. Of course they all play an important role in the ecosystem. I have to admit however, I'm partial to two: woodpeckers and bluebirds.

When I was just a little tike, my Granny Ruth's "Uncle Alton" used to refer to me as a "little peckerwood", the country name for

woodpeckers. He would call me over, sit me on his lap, and tell me stories about the old days. I remember how pleasant he smelled in his khaki work pants and shirt. I suppose it was a bit odd that he wore "work" clothes because he didn't work. It wasn't till after he was long gone that I found out he was permanently inebriated on vanilla extract, the only source of alcohol at the country store! It seems that nobody else liked him, but I sure did. Every time I see a "peckerwood" of any kind, I think of my great Uncle Alton. I'm particularly fond of pileated woodpeckers, which my Papaw used to call "rain crows". Of course I dream of seeing an Ivory Billed woodpecker one day. This past fall I planted forty baldcypress in my little swamps so that a thousand years from now they'll have a place to nest. How's THAT for planning ahead!

My favorite bird on earth is the bluebird. I didn't really pay much attention to the fact that they existed until Mrs. Mary Daly befriended me. I mowed Mr. and Mrs. Daly's large yard in Longview as a kid, which included mowing around a number of bluebird boxes on posts. They also had a bird feeder, a birdbath, and three hummingbird feeders all of which had to be refilled daily to satisfy her winged nature center.

The Daly's place in Longview was my first lesson in attracting birds to the landscape. They had a house surrounded by trees, bordered by wide-open space and a fencerow in back. The situation was made more perfect with forested woods lining the edges. I don't remember them using any outdoor pesticides or fertilizer either for that matter. It was the perfect habitat for supporting a diverse bird population as it supplied their three main requirements, food, water, and shelter.

Though the Daly's provided supplemental food with a bird feeder, I feel it's much more natural to do the same with appropriate plants. Just remember that some birds feed primarily on seeds (buntings and goldfinches), some on fruits and insects (bluebirds and woodpeckers), and off course some on flowers (hummingbirds).

It's a misnomer that exotic spe-

cies don't provide food for local birds. How do you think privet and honeysuckle spread so fast? It's much more responsible to feed native birds with native plants. Everybody likes home cooked meals, right? Though I try to provide a full buffet of local natives including those with seeds and fruit, I especially aim to please my bluebirds and woodpeckers with fruiting species like native hollies, red cedar, dogwood, and persimmon. In addition I make a conscious effort to leave dead trees standing, which provide insects for the woodpeckers and nesting cavities for both. Potential nesting sites for both of these birds has plummeted due to the fact that modern society won't tolerate standing dead trees or "snags". Unfortunately there is much life in nature that depends on them. I call it "life after death" or "live and let die"!

Don't forget to provide clean water. Non-polluted lakes, ponds, and streams are ideal. But if you don't have immediate access to these, you'll want to provide a shallow birdbath or one of the ever popular "water gardens". The Daly's used a big flat rock with a natural hollow reservoir inside for their water source. Unlike my mom, who sports a desert birdbath, the Daly's replenished theirs daily.

Shelter includes both places to roost, safely hide from predators, and of course nest and raise young. Different birds need different habitats so try to provide as diverse a landscape as possible including both open space, trees, and dense "thickets". Birds like mockingbirds, wrens, and cardinals are perfectly capable of constructing nests in most areas, while others like woodpeckers, ducks, owls, and bluebirds are spe-

See For the Birds on pg 5



...For the Birds, con't from pg 4

cialty cavity dwellers. Unfortunately invasive European starlings and house sparrows are more than happy to take up the available rental space. I'm more than happy to evict them too! Though I prefer natural nesting cavities there don't seem to be near enough to go around, so I've put up a total of 70 bluebird boxes in my community "bluebird trail". Thanks to the late Marie Daly I can't help myself. Just like she was, they are so sweet and happy that I want to see them everywhere. They actually seem

to enjoy being around people and their little warbling tune is downright addictive. I supposed I'm out of control (again). Perhaps I need therapy for "the blues"?

For more information on planting and maintaining a landscape for the birds, check out this fine book by my good friends from Baton Rouge: Attracting Birds to Southern Gardens (Taylor Pub-

lishing, 1993) by Thomas Pope, Neil Odenwald, and Charles Fryling, Jr.

Note: We've set up a bird feeding station in the Marsh Meadow near the Peter and Cassandra Loos bench under the Long Leaf Pine. Come take a look. Also don't forgot to get one of us to show you the Red Shouldered Hawk's active nest.

Dottie Wisely Visits Nacogdoches

By David Creech

We enjoyed a special visit by Dottie Wisely and her daughter Debbie Vondle. The two had driven here all the way from Indiana in a tiny red Smart Car to take in the glory of the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden.

Dottie is the special lady who saw something here way back in 1999. Gayla Mize had long been an arboretum ally for a greener garden world here at SFA and she connected the two of us. I'm not totally sure what Dottie saw, but I think she became convinced we were a hard-working bunch with plenty of vision. There were troops of students, a small army of cheerful volunteers, and finally there was a spot with real garden potential. The Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden was born. After a year of remarkable work with the Office of Advancement, she stepped up to make it all happen with an endowment to support the project. Named for her mother, an avid and passionate gardener herself, the garden was dedicated in April 2000. Almost a decade old, the garden has taken on a life of its own.

There's a reason that each year has found the azalea garden a little happier and healthier than the year before. It's Barbara Stump. She has quietly led the signage program to where it is today – and more is in the pipeline. She's added many new varieties of azaleas, camellias, and Japanese maples. The garden is essentially brimming over. Barbara has connected herself to the plant world through developing numerous con-

tacts across the South. The azalea garden's annual symposium has gotten better every year. In the arboretum and botanical garden community of the South, this garden is on the map. Barbara's thirty brand new benches are now totally at home in the garden.

Even though I winced at the bill, I agree that the final effect has been dramatic. Everyone likes them. I will no longer ask, "Why can't our visitors just sit on a log?" Those days are gone.

In 2000, at the dedication, as I was walking Dottie from our big red and white tent gathering to the unveiling of the dedicatory rock and bronze plaque, I leaned over to her and asked her if she didn't think that this was so much more exciting and better than just another building? She heartily agreed. I admired that about Dottie. A garden is not a building. There are more things to think about when you donate to a garden project. It changes every day. It's always just a step or two away from some silly climate disaster. To be honest, it's a roll of

the dice. Yet, plants and people fall together in the right way, the sun shines, and the rain does fall, well, good things can happen. We are sure of that. Dottie, Nacogdoches says Thank You!



An Inside Peak at Garden Gala Day

By Dawn Stover

Our spring plant sale is right around the corner. As much work as these are to pull together, I am really looking forward to this year's Garden Gala Day. An interesting twist is afoot with the collaborative efforts of SFA Outdoor Pursuits and the Arboretum. Michael Maningas, director of Outdoor Pursuits, called me earlier this year to ask if we would mind sharing the Intramural Fields with their Earth Day Celebration. Celebrating Earth Day is not a new tradition in Nacogdoches, but it is relatively new as an SFA event. Michael was looking to provide students with exposure to environmental principles, and Earth Day provides an excellent platform for just that purpose. And what a better collaboration than Earth Day, Outdoor Pursuits, and GARDENING! So we are not only sharing the Intramural Fields, we are sharing the day. Our two events have merged into one giant earth-loving scene with people who may have different interests in life but share a common love for sunshine and outdoors. The SFA Steel Drum band who will also share the stage with some pretty fantastic speakers as well as booths from local individuals and businesses who share and promote a "Sustainable and Healthy Future." Oh, and by the way, we'll be selling a plant or two.

Speaking of selling plants, how about a little teaser of what's to come?

The cool stuff:

Hippeastrum gracilis seedlings - graceful amaryllis - a beautiful solid red, hardy amaryllis.



Thysanoleana maxima - tiger grass - this ornamental grass resembles bamboo without the invasiveness and the gargantuan height. This tightly clumped beauty would make an excellent, albeit perennial screen.

Cestrum x cultum 'Cretan's Purple' - purple jessamine - There are few jessamine that I get excited about, but this one is an exceptional exception. Well-shaped plants are SMOTHERED in clusters of purple flowers in late summer and fall. It's definitely a head turner. By the way, night blooming jessamine is worth getting excited about too - Greg's growing that for the sale too!

Magnolia 'Jane' and 'Jon Jon' - deciduous magnolias - Jane is medium sized with dark pink flowers and Jon Jon is a tall, stately specimen with HUGE blush-white flowers.

Lonicera sempervirens - native honeysuckle - Greg tells me that his mom is on a one-woman mission to eradicate all the invasive Japanese honeysuckle in the woods and replace it with our beautiful native. Let's help her out! We have three varieties to choose from! The species has brilliant orange flowers, 'John Clayton' has vibrant yellow flowers, and 'Magnifica' had bright orange flowers with lighter throats.



Aquilegia chrysantha 'Texas Gold' - columbine - These beauties are right at home in shady gardens. Buttery-yellow, spurred flowers top fine textured foliage in late spring.

For butterflies:

Echinacea 'Crazy Pink™' - I'm crazy for coneflowers period, but this little number blooms it's crazy little head off. The developers brag that they counted 110 blooms on just one plant. I haven't counted that many yet, but it's still early in the year!

Phlox! Phlox! Phlox! I loooove phlox. Lightly fragrant, excellent cut flower, and attracts butterflies and hummingbirds. You loooove them too, right?



Phlox paniculata - garden or summer phlox - two varieties have performed very well in our humid climate with not a single spot of powdery mildew. 'Robert Poore' has the traditional bright pink flowers and 'John Fanick' is more compact with soft pinkish-white flowers.

Phlox 'Minnie Pearl' - Large clusters of white flowers SMOTHER foot-tall foliage. This plant scared me when I first grew it - it goes completely dormant in the summer, only to return happily each spring!

Phlox pilosa 'Forest Frost' - white prairie phlox - a pure white selection of this precious, native, perennial.

Milkweed - Butterfly gardens are not complete without host plants for caterpillars to munch on. Milkweed is the host plant for monarch caterpillars. Since we are on their migratory flight path, it is critical that we provide a healthy pit stop for their journey.

Asclepias currasavica - reseeding annual with bright orange, red or yellow flowers. Easiest milkweed to grow.

Asclepias syriaca - clusters of fragrant, soft-purple flowers set this species apart. Needs well-drained soil.

Asclepias tuberosa - perennial with bright orange flowers. Prefers good drainage.

Asclepias verticillata - slender foliage with delicate, greenish-white flowers. Thrives in dry soils.

Monarda 'Peter's Purple' - bee balm - a wonderful hybrid found by Peter Loos with superior mildew resistance, upright habit, and gorgeous purple flowers.



I'll Have Hot Sauce With My Frijolitos, Please

By David Creech

Sophora secundiflora is simply a really great plant for gardeners in the Pineywoods of Texas. Whether called Texas mountain laurel, mescal bean, or frijolito, it's actually quite common in western regions of the state. It's a staple of the hill country but rarely encountered in the Pineywoods. I'm not sure why since it's tough as nails, drought resistant, fully evergreen, breath taking in bloom and fragrant to match. Reported to reach thirty feet in the wilds of Texas, New Mexico and northern Mexico, most landscape specimens come in at half that. If there's a negative, it's that the species is a bit of a slow grower. We're a fast food - fast plants kind of society and waiting a decade or two for a plant to obtain stature and class rarely fits the bill. Generally considered a Zone 8 to 9 plant, hardy forms are reported but unexploited. Plants in Dallas and parts north have rarely appeared healthy to me but there are exceptions.



A beautiful specimen Texas mountain laurel in the gardens at Treeseach Farms in Houston, Texas

Texas mountain laurel is a member of the Fabaceae family and most of the 50+ species enjoy showy pea-like flowers in terminal racemes or panicles. This rather cosmopolitan genus features both deciduous and evergreen species. While most Texas mountain laurels sport blue and lavender flowers, there are white

flowering forms and I've seen a genotype in Austin that features light pink blooms. There is also a rarely encountered botanical variety, *Sophora secundiflora* var. *pulverulenta*, that has pubescent gray leaves. We have this form in the Mast Arboretum and it's even slower than the straight species.

To grow Texas mountain laurel in eastern climates it's critically important to provide superior drainage; a berm or raised bed will do the trick. Addition of limestone to the soil is also recommended. We do have one white-flowering specimen in a spot at the

corner of the Purchasing and Inventory building on campus that was planted conventionally and it's very healthy. While never watered, I think the spot is less than perfectly drained, yet, the plant has been healthy and vigorous.

Propagation of seed is usually a one hour soak in sulfuric acid to scarify the seed. A hobby gardener can simply use a file to cut through the tough seed coat. We have rooted the species but it's quite difficult and percentages are low.

For unique forms and flower colors, it might be possible in east Texas to run the plant through several generations of seedlings to get to a pure form. We have seedlings of the white flowering form and once they bloom, the blue ones are culled, and the process is repeated for five or six generations. At this point, we may be able

to stabilize the white form from seed. I've put some math to this problem and my calculations indicate that I'll be about 100 years old when we reach the fifth or sixth generation. For some reason, that doesn't really appear to me to be a really great idea.

An Inside Peak at Garden Gala Day, cont.

Salvia farinacea 'Henry Duelberg' - mealy cup sage - big, healthy foliage and flowers with excellent heat and drought tolerance.

Other butterfly plants: *Liatrix spicata*, *Eupatorium fistulosum*, *Hamelia patens*, *Cestrum*, *Passiflora incarnata*, *Salvia*, *Plumbago auriculata*, *Rudbeckia*, *Gomphrena globosa*, *Zinnia*.

Foliage Interest: When summer arrives and plants lull into a greenish slumber, where do we find color? Foliage of course!

Ensete ventricosum 'Maurellii' - Abyssinian banana - this single-trunked specimen has

been reliably hardy for us for the past three years. Giant leaves have a lovely burgundy accents

Stromanthe sanguinea 'Tricolor' - Variegated stromanthe - here's a neat, alternative groundcover with a tropical flare. The tops of the foliage is variegated with dark green and white while the underside is a glowing hot pink. Best for a brightly shaded location. Has returned for us the last two winters.

Furcraea foetida 'Mediopicta' - Giant Cabuya - a spineless agave relative with bright creamy striped leaves. Over time

makes a dramatic summer accent plant. Might want to consider bringing in for the winter anywhere north of Houston. Worth the trouble!

Yikes! I'm out of room. Come see me at the plant sale and I'll tell you more!



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