

SFA Gardens News

Volume 8, Issue 1

Winter 2013

Notes from the Director

By Dr. David Creech

In so many ways, things **couldn't be better than now.** If you look past the flurry of our six staff members, great volunteers and students — if you peer past the face of this garden — **well, it's then** you will see we win the **most cheerful staff on campus award. It's true. We've** got our health, a job, land, water, sun, infrastructure, people, students and a university administration with a high level of support — and occasionally a bit of tolerance — all rolled up into one product. Yes, we are indeed lucky gardeners. In fact, the other day, Dawn, Greg, Barb, Elyce, Duke, Kerry and I were in an SFA van off on another plant/conference adventure, when we broke out into song. With some radio tunes as background, I would sing out **"Who's got it better than us?"** and staff would yell back **"Nobody!"** Actually this whole scene is not true — **it's made up** — but I really like the concept. To be even more honest, I have to credit Dale Perritt, my chair and friend, who created this vision in my head with a recounting of his youth and family outings on **so many years ago. It's just** a darn pretty picture. I took it as our own.

Good news really is

everywhere! Keep your eyes peeled to the PNPC, **and you'll soon see a brand** new Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Center going up. And if things go **right, we'll be hosting a** grand opening before the year is out. At the PNPC, Greg is whipping greenhouses, nurseries, landscapes and student workers into shape. Students need training, you know. Our controlled burn **at the PNPC's Cass and Peter** Loos marsh was actually controlled! Even though we got the word out for the fire event quite early, very few folks were interested enough to show up. That really is kind of good news. Being able to burn a two-acre patch of perched wetland inside the city limits is now passé. I promise it **hasn't always been like that.** Thanks go out to SFA, the Texas Forest Service and Nacogdoches Fire Department for making this happen.

At the Gayla Mize Garden, we are ready! Duke and crew have finished a great planting season and continue to spread concrete crumbs on our trail system. This will slowly mellow into an excellent ADA-compliant, all-weather surface. **We're about to un-**dertake an epic effort to get

rafters up on the pavilion. Our deep well is finally in, and a 7.5 horse power, variable speed pump can hum out a hefty 50 to 60 gallons **per minute, plus we've got** enough electrical power on hand to light up a small city. Barb, Duke and crew have dotted the Gayla Mize Garden with some classy new benches scattered here and there across the eight acres. It never ceases to amaze me how many folks, kids, dogs and bike enthusiasts are finding the place and calling it home.

Dawn and Duke have kept the Mast Arboretum and Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden spic and span with many, many new plants in the ground. The Sustainable Community Education Garden next to the SFA intramural field has gotten a facelift, and spring is soon to be a flurry of vegetable fun. The Taxodium plantings along LaNana are thriving, and, while few can see it now this is going to be a very special half mile stretch at SFA in five years. In a **1,000 years, it'll be a knock-**out. Our SFA Horticulture Club judging team competed well at the J.B. Storey Horticulture Judging Contest at the Southern Region meeting of the American Society

The Byzantine Gladiolus

By Greg Grant

Gladiolus have been popular garden flowers for many years. They are members of the iris family, most owing their origins to Africa. The genus *Gladiolus* means “little sword” referring to the erect sword-like foliage. Although not related to lilies, you’ll often see them listed as “sword lilies” in historic garden literature. Though generally marketed alongside bulbs, which are mainly comprised of modified foliage, gladiolus are actually propagated by and sold as corms, which are wholly made up of modified stem. Today, long majestic spires of colorful modern gladiolus (*Gladiolus x hortulanus*) are most often associated with florists, weddings and lavish altar arrangements in churches. These large flowered products of skillful horticultural breeding started around the mid-1800s, most likely with *Gladiolus dalenii* (formerly *G. natalensis*, and *G. psittacinus*). Due to the shape and color of its orange and yellow flowers, *G. dalenii* is generally referred to as the parrot gladiolus. It’s occasionally found in old Texas gardens and cemeteries and can be had from specialty mail order nurseries. Unlike its modern offspring, the parrot glad lives and survives as a perennial in Southern gardens.

Before larger flowered gladiolus became all the rage, the Byzantine gladiolus (*Gladiolus byzantinus*) reined king in Southern gardens. This native of Spain sports vivid magenta spires of smaller flowers on three foot stems. Occasionally called “Jacob’s ladder,” it’s generally

known as the Byzantine gladiolus to those Texas gardeners who have had the fortunate experience of getting to know it. It unfortunately fell out of favor with garden trend setters due to its smaller flowers and its gaudy hot pink color. For years, garden writers maligned the color magenta. Thank goodness today’s garden writers have come to their senses for it’s a wonderful color.



Byzantine gladiolus cheerfully bloom at Greg’s

In Europe, this hardy gladiolus has been cultivated since ancient times and was generally known as the “corn flag” as it was often found growing wild in corn fields around the Mediterranean. It was pictured in *Curtis’s Botanical Magazine* in 1805.

The exact date of its introduction into Texas gardens isn’t known.

Perhaps the early Spanish settlers introduced it. William Prince did offer it in an 1820 catalog from the Linnaean Botanic Garden in Long Island, New York. Many noted early Southern gardens obtained plants from William Prince.

Today, the tough as nails Byzantine gladiolus is most often seen around farm houses along country roads, at abandoned home sites, and in rural cemeteries. Throughout the years it has been passed along and traded like favorite family recipes. While upscale gardeners pledged their allegiance to the large multicolored modern glad that had to be replanted each year, country gardeners and those of modest means remained loyal to the perennial magenta stalwart. Only in recent times have the Byzantine gladiolus begun to show up among commercial sources again. Unfortunately, savvy gardeners need to know who they are dealing with. An inexpensive imposter is generally peddled for this favorite southern heirloom in Dutch and other large commercial bulb suppliers. A weak growing, small, pale flowered related species is what is commonly sold.

Blooms are generally sparse, above thin foliage and rapidly multiplying corms. It literally pales in comparison to the real thing. Luckily, dedicated Southern bulb enthusiasts have made the authentic Byzantine gladiolus available from small spe-

cont.

Gladiolus, cont.

cialty American growers and suppliers. Be very sure of what you are getting before you order.

The real McCoy grows in either sand or clay and tolerates both very acid and very alkaline soils. It will not tolerate shade or wet soils, however. Unlike its large flowered modern cousins, the Byzantine glad **doesn't require staking and doesn't** require dividing or lifting for the **winter. It's not unheard of for a** clump of Byzantine gladiolus to be happily blooming in the same spot for more than one hundred years.

The true Byzantine glad doesn't set any viable seed and, therefore, has to be propagated through division. The best time to accomplish this is early summer, as the clumps are going dormant and the leaves are turning brown. The clumps can then be set into well aerated baskets or paper bags until they are completely dried. Then the clumps

of corms can be pulled apart and reset into the garden. Be sure to save all the tiny cormels as they too will grow into blooming sized corms after 2 or 3 growing seasons. Obtaining Byzantine gladiolus is a good investment, as over the years a single corm can literally turn into hundreds. Beg, borrow or buy some if **you can. You'll be glad you did!**

For more information on Byzantine gladiolus and other heirloom southern bulbs, see:

Garden Bulbs for the South, 2nd edition (2007, Timber Press) by Scott Ogden

Heirloom Gardening in the South (2011, Texas A&M Press) by William C. Welch and Greg Grant

Sources for true heirloom Byzantine gladiolus:

Bayou City Heirloom Bulbs
(bayoucityheirloombulbs.com)

Old House Gardens
(oldhousegardens.com)

Plant Delights Nursery
(plantdelights.com)

Southern Bulb Company
(southernbulbs.com)



Notes, cont.

for Horticultural Science, held this year in Orlando, Fla. Led by adviser Jeff Adkins, the club mantra here is **“if you're going to run with the big dogs, you've got to get off the porch.”**

In terms of educational programming, we can tout more seminars, workshops and lectures than ever before. As for kids, Elyce and Kerry are the pied pipers for all the littlest citizens who walk and run here and there in the forest – all getting a much needed dose of nature.

Finally, I've decided I've been talking to too many folks in too many places and need to slow down. Of course, the staff says

“yeah, sure,” and, to be honest, I'm now flying away in early March to Mexico for a great plant adventure. Our host is Dr. Teobaldo Equiluz, a NCSU-educated forester who has a large nursery, other businesses and a relationship with the Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo in Texcoco, which is the national school of agriculture. I'm part of a band of China/USA horticulturists making a connection over one tree, the Arbole de Tule, the famous *ahuehuete* **which means “old man of the water” in Nahuatl. If you don't speak** Spanish, think the Mexican version of the baldcypress. With a road **trip to Oaxaca to see the “big one” (200 feet in circumference**

and 3,000 years old!) and stops along the streams and rivers coming out of the San Madre Oriental mountains, this is bound to be a **great trip. I'm one of three Americans** (Mark Weathington of NC State and Geoff Denny of Mississippi State) and on the China side is my good friend and colleague Professor Yin Yunlong of the Nanjing Botanical Garden with two of his colleagues. More good news! **If we're held up for ransom, Dawn has already formed a “Free Dave Creech” committee to raise funds. She's decided that all proceeds** over the ransom amount will go to the garden! Until next time, let's keep planting.

Some Kind of Wonderful

By Dawn Stover

As I began writing, I had a clear direction in mind: the fragrant plants of late winter. Their subtle yet confident way of letting us know that spring is knocking at the door. However, there's just too much I'm excited about to limit this article to the subtleties of late winter fragrance. Plus on rainy or humid days, which we've had many of recently, the fragrance is just too light to lift through heavy air. However, there are tons of gorgeous camellias blooming that grab you like an extreme couponer grabs up circulars, no matter the weather. Oh, and then there's news on the vegetable front and way too many opportunities to learn about gardening to count. You can see why any ordered person would take on a tangential track!

Hope really does spring eternal with late winter fragrance. Generally these plants are not showiest, but their sweet scent more than makes up for their lack of showmanship. I always look forward to the fragrant winter-sweet, *Chimonanthes praecox*, with its forgettable, waxy yellow flowers yet powerful sweetness that would dare not overbear. Often the hardest to see yet easiest to smell, the tea olive — *Osmanthus heterophyllus* — perfumes the air from miniscule white flowers. And there's the odd little paperbush — *Edgeworthia chrysantha* — with upright clusters of fuzzy, yellow flowers. They're not common in the landscape, but should be for they offer winter color as well as nearly perfect, knee-high form.

And of course there's the variegat-

ed daphne, *Daphne odora* 'Marginata,' is the prettiest of the bunch. Known to be a tad bit finicky, if you can site daphne in the right location, she will reward you with clusters of soft pink flowers nestled in pretty, variegated foliage. The fragrance has a Fruit Loop like quality but, in my opinion, smells just like heaven.



A honeybee visits *Camellia japonica* 'Whoopee' in early February

Let's move on to the standout stars! There is nothing more reliable for winter color than the stalwart southern favorite: the camellia. Most camellias that bloom in the heart of winter are *Camellia japonica* selections or hybrids. My grandmother called them japonicas reserving the camellia name for the fall blooming *sasanqua* species. I'm not sure if I ever convinced her that a japonica was in fact a camellia, too. Regardless, nothing compares to big, blousy, shocking-red blossoms, unless of course it's a

pink variety or perhaps a neatly variegated one. We've been lucky to stumble upon an amazing camellia breeder and nurseryman, Bobby Green of Fairhope, Ala, has passed on some really marvelous new flower forms and colors. Many of our newest acquisitions are in the Gayla Mize Garden. They're worth a visit.

On the veggie front, we're still chugging along in the SFA Sustainable Community Education Garden. We've adopted a no-till philosophy, instead using raised planting rows, building good soil, and implementing crop rotation. As luck would have it, we had a giant mountain of compost that now serves as the foundation for our rows. In addition, we are now part of the All American Selections trialing program. Technically, I serve as the judge, but SFA claims the AAS site. We will trial two or three known vegetable varieties against a potential new AAS selection. There are 67 different varieties of 15 different kinds of vegetables in 21 different comparisons. Needless to say, we might be calling on you for some taste testing later this spring!

As for learning opportunities, please visit our website, as they are too numerous to list! Click on Garden Events at our home page: <http://sfagarden.sfasu.edu>. You can also keep up with us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sfa.gardens>.

Azaleas on Our Minds

By Barbara Stump

The 15th annual Nacogdoches Azalea Trail is March 1-31. This year, the first ever kick-off will be an official Chamber of Commerce ribbon-cutting March 1, from 4-6 p.m. in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden Council Ring. Sponsored by the Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau, this will be a fun and free event, where city and SFA leaders can meet the national Azalea Society of America president, John Migas, and shine a spotlight on both the Azalea Trail and the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden and how each entity supports and promotes the other.

The next day John Migas is our featured speaker for the 10th annual Azalea Trail Azalea Symposium. His **topic will be “Building Azalea Gardens: Large and Small.”** John has expertise in both sizes of gardens, and attendees will be able to get practical tips for success in their home gardens. Having John here in 2013 is especially timely, since the national ASA convention is coming back to Nacogdoches in 2015. What we learn at this symposium can be applied to add to or rejuvenate our existing azalea landscapes. He has **agreed to discuss attendees’ landscape plans** — whether drawn out or as a wish list — to help people see how to improve their home gardens. We want to wow the convention visitors with how much our garden city has blossomed since 2007 when they last visited. The fee for the day is \$40 for SFA Gardens members and \$50 for non-members, including lunch and guided tours of the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden and the Gayla Mize Garden. John and I will point out garden design/construction concepts during

the tours. The registration form is online:

www.nacogdochesazaleas.org.

Speaking of the Azalea Society of America, we are proud to announce that Dr. Creech has been elected as the president of the Texas Chapter! We know he will do a great job in encouraging more people to plant and enjoy azaleas.

Closer to home, the Texas Chapter held a service project on Jan. 26 in Nacogdoches, which culminated a partnership of five organizations, united in the goal to restore and improve a historic cemetery. The five organizations are: the City of Nacogdoches Historic Sites Department; Friends of Historic Nacogdoches Inc.; SFA Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity; the Texas Chapter of the ASA; and SFA Gardens. The Friends group led the effort, with the city in full support. Zion Hill Baptist Church had an old cemetery that had become neglected and overgrown. The city cleared the undergrowth, and the SFA history **department’s archeological experts**

used ground-penetrating radar to locate 18 graves that did not have markers. Research did not reveal the names of those interred. Alpha Phi Alpha stepped in to raise funds **to for granite “Unknown” grave markers.** Records of all the graves in the historic cemetery off Park Street **are now in SFA’s historic archives,** and an interpretive brochure is available. City funds covered bringing in soil for a garden to frame the **back of the cemetery and Friends’** funds covered the cost of irrigation and wrought-iron fencing to keep cars from parking on the site. Finally, the Texas Chapter of the ASA planted nearly 100 azaleas that were donated by member Gladden Willis of Willis Farm Nursery in Doyline, **La. By spring, the double white ‘H. H. Hume’ and purple-rose Encore ‘Autumn Rouge’ azaleas will provide** a lovely backdrop to this restored historic cemetery, one of the oldest African-American cemeteries in **Texas. Isn’t it amazing what can be accomplished when like-minded groups agree on a goal?**



Azalea planting volunteers: Jimmy Rodriguez, Bobbie Bounds, Peg Kern, Sandra Dugan, JoAnn Smith, Barbara Stump, Sherrie Randall, Caryl and Harold Hall, David Creech and Jeff Abt. Charles Bradberry doubled as photographer and is not pictured.

Better than Recess

By Elyce Rodewald

A wonderful community collaboration has been growing quietly during the past few months, and as spring approaches, this new collaboration is blooming. Third-graders in Nacogdoches ISD will soon be growing vegetables in raised-bed gardens on their campuses. Along the way, they will be learning about weather, data collection, soil, life cycles, measuring, real-life math applications, cooperation, community and so much more. Felicia Foster, curriculum coordinator at Carpenter Elementary, explains, **“We plan to tie our gardens in with our upcoming units for the remainder of the year — ‘Weather and Water Cycle,’ ‘Earth Resources’ and ‘Organisms and Environments’ and develop a series of lessons. Students will also tie in the Weatherbug to monitor the weather as it connects to the conditions for growing vegetables and will also journal the growth process.”** Other teachers look at the gardens as an excellent subject for creative or narrative writing and are excited about ties to literature.



The idea for school gardens sprouted when Healthy Nacogdoches Coalition received funding through an ACHIEVE grant to put systems in place that would encourage people to live a healthier life-

style. Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful also contributed funds for garden construction. Buzz Dutton, Executive Director of Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful explained, **“The mission of Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful is ‘to enhance our community by encouraging individual responsibility,’ and we can find no better way to achieve that goal than helping encourage young people. By providing funds for the project, we hope that the children will not only have fun but also carry with them an appreciation of gardening far past the third grade. One cannot be a gardener without respecting our environment and the value of keeping it clean, flourishing and beautiful. The Board of Directors and staff of KNB consider it ‘money well spent.’”**

SFA Gardens staff agreed to assist with equipment, labor and coordinating the project. SFA Horticulture student, Christie Wright, jumped on board as a personal **“garden consultant” to the third grade teachers, and Dr. Cheryl Boyette is providing two professional development workshops for the teachers to help them incorporate the garden into their third-grade curriculum.** SFA Nacogdoches Naturally student workers and SFA students from all areas of campus have also contributed their time and efforts in garden construction.

Nacogdoches ISD Facilities Manager Chris Davis was happy to help us find appropriate places on each campus for the gardens and serve as integrated pest manager; NISD principals and administrators said **“Let’s garden!”; and the third grade**

teachers were enthusiastic. But what about the third-graders? I have met many children who are **terrified of earth worms, don’t** want to get their hands dirty, and refuse to sit on the ground. I had to wonder if the third grade garden project would appeal to the target audience.



If garden construction day is any indication, we are indeed growing a bountiful crop of young gardeners. These children dug out stubborn grass, moved concrete blocks, toted buckets of mushroom compost, hoed, shoveled, found grubs, got rid of grubs, found earthworms, put the earthworms in the garden, broke up clumps of soil, smoothed, raked, exclaimed, cooperated, problem-solved, observed and documented their experience. I heard so many wonderful comments from **the children: “Can we please come out here for science class at least once a week?” “I love the way this soil feels.” “Do you need help with that?” “Do we have to leave already?”**

The best comment of all was from a grinning youngster digging vigorously at a stubborn clump of grass. **“THIS is better than recess,” said. I couldn’t agree more.**

Nacogdoches Naturally Update

By Kerry Lemon

On an unseasonably warm Saturday morning in January, Nacogdoches Naturally Family Outdoor Adventures made a visit to the Texas Forestry Museum in Lufkin. In addition to learning about the rich history of the East Texas Pineywoods, children worked side by side with their parents on a family service project for the museum.

In an attempt to beat the rain, the group began the day outside with their hands in the dirt, giving a much needed winter cleaning to the flower beds in preparation for spring days to come. Under the direction of David Young, education director of the museum, families put on gloves, grabbed tools and began pulling weeds and dead plants. It was impressive to see the effort put forth as everyone did their share of the work.

After finishing up for the morning, the group of 20 headed inside for a tour of exhibits that highlight the people, places, and products of the 14 million acres of the East Texas Pineywoods. Sawmills, logging railroads and modern forest management have all influenced East Texas culture and the museum's extensive collection is a remarkable way to make the journey back through time. David Young, an East Texas native himself, brought history to life by sharing stories of the past. Favorite parts of the day for the kids were seeing the sawmill in action and ringing the bell on the train in the outdoor exhibit, which featured a restored railroad station. At the end of the tour, families returned inside for a well-earned lunch treat.

Our community benefits greatly

from Forest Service programs and facilities. By giving back to their community on projects like this, families can begin to develop an understanding of the value of service. Hopefully, the children will return to the museum in the future and take pride in the fact that they contributed their small part.

Nacogdoches Naturally offers after-school programs for children who attend the Boys and Girls Club and Raguet Elementary as well as Family Outdoor Adventures Saturday programs. The project is sponsored by SFA Gardens and received funding this year through a More Kids in the Woods grant from the

U.S. Department of Agriculture U.S. Forest Service. All activities are designed to cultivate outdoor skills and an awareness of forest ecology in the hopes of children and families developing a lifetime enjoyment of the natural world.

Monthly outings and educational events are scheduled for the spring and summer months, including SFA Pineywoods Camp programs for children ages 4-15 during June and July. For information and to register, visit the Environmental Education link at our website: sfagardens.sfasu.edu/.





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Come Grow With us!

Plains, Trains and Automobiles By Dawn Stover

Super Bowl weekend found five SFA Horticulture students in Orlando, Fla., ready to compete against other members of the American Collegiate Branch of the Southern Region of American Society for Horticulture Sciences annual J. Benton Storey Horticulture Judging Contest. The judging competition consists of plant identification as well as judging of nursery and floriculture crops, fruit and nut crops and vegetables. SFA traditionally does quite well, despite competition from larger, land-grant universities like Texas A&M and Mississippi State University. This year our judging students earned a slew of awards including second place overall team, third place team Greenhouse Floral and Foliage Plants, first place team Woody Ornamentals and third place team Vegetable Crops.



Our ACB-SRASHS team: Amny Rose, Felicia English, Ken Moyer, Eric Golestan and Spence Simmons

Individually our members also performed well. Felicia English, Kennard senior, placed first in Greenhouse Floral and Foliage Plants and first in Vegetable Crops. Ken Moyer, Cypress junior, placed second in Woody Ornamentals. Eric Golestan, Southlake senior, placed first in Fruit and Nut Crops. Spence Simmons, Tyler senior, gave a presentation in the J.B. Edmund Undergraduate Student Paper Competition titled **“Influence of N Source and Rate on Growth and Leaf Nutrient Content of a *Taxodium* Clone.”** **Way to go team!**