



SFA Gardens *News*

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Spring 2015

Notes from the Director

By Dave Creech

We have great news! SFA Gardens and the Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture are now partnering with Moody Gardens on an ornamental plant evaluation project. Working with our horticultural counterparts at Moody Gardens, this three-year project will test the limits of salt tolerance – from the soil and the air – of a wide range of ornamentals in an in-ground nursery setting. With a focus on woody shrubs and trees, our goal is to find plants that survive and thrive in the conditions of Galveston Island. We will be studying a range of what we call “planting hole modifications” to determine those strategies for best growth in the early establishment years. It’s a great project and if there was ever a place that needs it, it’s Galveston.

According to the Hurricane Ike Street Tree Survey Report, prepared by the Texas A&M Forest service, the City of Galveston lost approximately 40,000 trees following the storm in 2008. While the 110 mph wind no doubt led to the demise of many of these trees, the 15-foot storm surge dealt the heaviest blow, inundating the city with sea water that es-

entially poisoned the island’s vegetation through soil salinization. Though Hurricane Ike was long ago, there will no doubt be future events to challenge the island. Climate models that predict rising ocean levels and increasing instances of coastal flooding confirm the need to find climate-change friendly plants for the 21st century.

horticulturist at Moody Gardens. Our technician, Brock Vinson, will dedicate time to the project over the next three years. He will serve as the technician responsible for our SFA/Moody Nursery, a new resource under development. Vinson will also play a critical role in developing the beds and irrigation system at the Moody Garden plots. He will help facilitate



My responsibility is simple. I travel and connect with nursery and university friends across the South. I locate and acquire promising plants to bring back to the project. At SFA, we propagate and grow plants, and then deliver them to Moody Gardens. We will work closely with Danny Carson,

several graduate student research projects, help with the application of treatments, and be responsible for record keeping. The team is comprised of faculty, staff and students from the SFA College of Forestry and Agriculture, and include Dr. Leon Young, director of the SFA Soil,

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Plant, and Tissue Testing Laboratory; Dr. Ken Farrish, director of the Division of Environmental Science; Jill Pickett, technician; Elaine Harris, graduate research assistant; Dr. Dave Kulhavy, Lacy H. Hunt Professor of Landscape Ecology and Entomology; Dr. Dan Unger, associate professor of remote sensing and spatial science; and Dr. Yanli Zhang, associate professor of GIS. In addition to our SFA team, the project embraces a number of partnerships across the Gulf and Atlantic Coastal Plain to obtain the most promising selections of salt-tolerant plants.

Many of the species under investigation will be non-native. This project includes a full assessment of their invasive potential, which will be conducted prior to their promotion or release as salt-tolerant options for the Texas coast.

This project is especially inter-

esting to me. It will reflect the result of more than a decade trekking here and there on the coastal dikes in southeastern China. The scale of windbreak plantings, salt remediation and good horticulture happening right now is making a huge difference. China means business when it comes to coastal windbreak forest projects. I have worked with scientists at the Institute of Botany, Jiangsu Province and Chinese Academy of Sciences for many years. There is reason for optimism even though the challenges on Galveston Island are great. I keep thinking, only 5 feet above sea level!

The 2-acre SFA research plot will be located on the northern edge of Moody Gardens' property, adjacent to Offatts Bayou. I consider of the spot to be a revolving tree and shrub nursery – of interesting plants – with treatments to encour-

age plant survival and growth. The way we see it, after three years, the best performing species can be dug up or tree spaded and moved to the landscape at Moody Gardens. Additionally, they can be sold or donated to various civic or other projects on Galveston Island. We will replant the nursery with newer candidates for the next round.

Carson said it best, “We hope to provide salt-tolerant plants to residents and businesses in the area to beautify and diversify the city’s vegetation for human and non-human residents. Galveston is a major fly over for migratory birds and butterflies. We would like to encourage our winged friends and our visitors to stop and enjoy our sub-tropical paradise and ever amenity that goes along with it.” Well said! Until next time, let’s keep planting!

Tribute to a Trailblazer

By Dave Creech

We lost a great trailblazer when Dr. F.E. Abernethy left our community on March 21, 2015 for heaven. Ab was many, many things. He was a Regents Professor Emeritus in English, a spelunker, a hobo, a WWII veteran, a naturalist, an ecologist, a writer, a singer, a guitar player, and he blazed the Lanana and Banita Creek trails as if there were no tomorrow. I’ve been on many urban trails, and to me, the best are those that are broken up by what we call “points of interest.” A spot in the trail worth wandering around and taking a closer look. I call those points of interest the Jewels of the LaNana and Banita Creek necklace. Think about the lineup. We’ve got Liberty Hall, El Camino Real Park, Shady Grove

Cemetery, the Eyes of Father Margil, Zion Hill Baptist Cemetery, Pecan Acres Park, the Goodman Bridge, SFA Mast Arboretum, Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, Gayla Mize Garden, the Pineywoods Native Plant Center, and the new Jimmy Hinds Park. Head west on Austin St. to connect with Banita Creek and venture south to Ab’s Park, Banita Creek Park North, the Farmer’s Market, Banita Creek Hall, Banita Creek Park South, Hoya Soccer complex, Coy Sims softball field, and the Master Gardener Demonstration Garden. Amazing. Folks, this is a huge opportunity for serious tourism - the critical mass needed to attract tourists for a day long or



“Ab” stands in Banita Creek with his cello. Photo courtesy of Bruce Partain

longer adventure. It’s an opportunity to absorb many things in this special patch of the Pineywoods. Thank you, Ab, for having the vision, character and perseverance to make this all happen.

Celebrities, Paparazzi and Gardens. Oh, Why?

By Dawn Stover

Each year, we receive a fair amount of plant material to trial in the garden. Last fall, I received several varieties of hybrid phlox. Maybe I'm finally at that "if it's too loud, you're too old" stage. I was not at all impressed with trademarked name of the Paparazzi® Series. Individuals in the series included: LINDSAY, BRITNEY, ANGELINA, PARIS, ADELE, JAGGER and LEVINE. Maybe I'm too old to appreciate the clever way plant branders are trying to entice a younger generation of gardeners; however, I'm not so sure young folks who follow paparazzi reports are unplugged enough to put their hands in the soil. And why are the female celebrities addressed by first names and the men are addressed by surname? Perhaps the masculine nomenclature isn't as familiar as the feminine. After all, when you think Mick, do you instantly think Jagger? Or perhaps, like me, you think Mick Dundee or Mick of the mouse variety. Finally, I wonder if these celebrities know there are plants named after them, and if they even care? I digress.

Lucky for me (and you!), I didn't let my opinion of their name stop me from planting them last fall. At least two of the varieties really shined on the red carpet this spring – or at least on the pine straw carpet! The two superstars were *Phlox* 'PHL090201' JAGGER, and *Phlox* 'PHL091601' LEVINE, who put on a superior, long-lasting and very fragrant show. The remaining ladies' performances were lackluster at best, but I don't think it's fair to judge a perennial before it's been in the ground for at least two to

three years. Who knows, the ladies may sail through the summer heat and beat out the men next year. We'll see.



Phlox 'PHL090201' JAGGER blooms in the foreground with *Phlox* 'PHL091601' LEVINE phlox in the background

I've had a difficult time discerning the parentage of the Paparazzi® Series phlox as the literature is rather vague. There may or may not be parentage from *Phlox subulata*, *P. divaricata*, and/or *P. stolonifera*, and I don't have any hands-on experience with these species to help solve the puzzle. I do know I'm excited to follow these celebrities to see if they have the chops to really become superstars.

Both JAGGER and LEVINE are an explosion of fragrant purple flowers, JAGGER is a little darker and the lighter LEVINE is a bit bluer in color. There is such a powerful floral display, that they stand out from a distance. When you zoom in for a

close-up, you'll notice a delightfully grape-like fragrance that neither assaults nor overwhelms the nose. And they bloom for a surprisingly

long time. I expected a show of no more than two weeks, but I suspect they performed closer to four. They are a slightly taller than 1 foot, making them perfect for the front of a bed or border. I think I'll add Levine to my coral and blue mailbox planting at home in place of the not-so miniature buddleia I planted in front of my apricot colored roses. While neither JAGGER nor LEVINE will pass professional floriculture standards, they are perfectly suited for us non-florist folks to pick and put in a vase. Now that the blooms are spent, I'll cut them back, lightly fertilize and sit back to see how they fare this summer. All of the Paparazzi® Series phlox are listed to tolerate sun and part shade.

I remain skeptical of their summer performance, but as I always joke, my job is to kill plants. And you can place money on this: if I don't kill off these celebrities, you'll hear about them again in the future, and you'll see them in a future plant sale. I may have to draw the line if any further introductions are named after a Kardashian, but for now I'll join the Jagger and Levine fan clubs.

In the next newsletter, I'll write about the use of nonsensical cultivar names (i.e. *Phlox* 'PHL090201') and the use of trademarked names (i.e. Paparazzi® Series) in our industry and the confusion it has created.

Tiny Delights

By Greg Grant

When I was a youngster growing up outside of Longview, one of my money-making jobs was mowing the large lawn of the late Autry and Marie Daly. Though the word through the juvenile grapevine cast them as child-loathing ogres, they turned out to be the nicest couple I ever met. Since they had no children of their own, naturally they took me under their wings.

I owe much of my deep admiration for birds in the garden to this saintly couple. They not only kept food and water out for the birds, but they also sported the first martin house, bluebird boxes and hummingbird feeders I had ever seen. Though they didn't refer to it as such, their Northeast Texas hilltop landscape was truly a backyard bird habitat.

Mrs. Daly was particularly fond of her precious hummingbirds. She had three feeders hanging from the eaves of her house that she had to refill each and every day. While mowing "the back forty" as they called it, the house appeared to be shrouded in feathered green bees. I had never seen so many in one place. She was as tough as she was nice and would drag her step stool from feeder to feeder to snip the wasps in half that were lapping up her hummer's elixir. She was a giver and graciously gifted me my first hummingbird feeder. I think of her each day when I see the feeders the PNPC.

Mrs. Daly's love of hummingbirds didn't end with artificial feeders. She also kept a yard full of flowers for them, including the first Turk's cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus*

drummondii) I ever experienced.

The constant sulfur butterflies and somewhat edible fruit captured my attention until I noticed the steady stream of hummingbirds that claimed them as their own. It was then that I was officially hooked on both hummingbirds and Turk's cap.

The hummingbirds in Marie Daly's yard (as well as my own) were ruby-throated hummingbirds.



They are the most common hummingbird in the Eastern United States. Like all hummingbird species, the ruby throat is only here during the growing season, returning to Central America for the cold winter months. But it's not the only hummingbird species in our super-sized state. Eighteen species of hummingbirds can be found in Texas, more than any other state in the country, with New Mexico and Arizona as close runners-up. If the total number of species interests you, then you need to visit the Davis Mountains where 16 different species of hummingbirds have been documented, with five or six species actually breeding there. If the actual volume of hummingbirds

peaks your interest, than you need to be on the Coastal Bend of Texas (near Rockport and Fulton) during September when the ruby-throated hummingbirds gather in mass before heading across the Gulf of Mexico. They gather and pause there to store up on much needed nectar and protein before their exhausting flight to the Tropics.

I'm perfectly happy with only the ruby-throated hummingbird species at the PNPC and in my East Texas cottage garden. They are a never-ending source of amazement and delight, whether in flight, or at rest on my double-loop wire fence. I also relish my own swarming mass of hummingbirds that gather around my assorted Turk's cap cultivars each fall. It makes gardening worthwhile and shows us what an important part we play in our ever-threatened local ecosystems.

Anyone can fashion their home landscape into a hummingbird oasis by providing the same three essentials that all birds need: food, shelter and water. We are all familiar with artificial hummingbird feeders filled with sugar water at a ratio of one part refined sugar boiled in fourparts water (red dye isn't necessary and is not recommended). But it's more satisfying to create a natural hummingbird paradise using their favorite nectar plants. These include all salvias, Turk's cap, hibiscus, coral bean, red yucca, cardinal flower, Indian pink, standing cypress, red buckeye, cypress vine, cross vine, trumpet creeper and coral

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Delights, *cont.*

honeysuckle. One can never go wrong with red flowers, especially those that are tubular shaped.

They also need sources of protein, including many insects and spiders. Spiders are especially important to hummingbirds because they provide food for the birds and material to build their nests, by using webbing to bind bits of lichen together. Cultivating and providing

a constant source of small, live insects for both hummingbirds and other songbirds means limiting pesticide use as much as possible. I do this by choosing the toughest and most durable plants possible, including as many natives as I can. These native plants are what hummingbirds evolved to exist off of.

If you aren't already in the habit of taking time to "smell the roses,"

please do. Amazing hummingbirds are just one of the many outdoor delights in our very own gardens. They'll make you happy and glad to be alive. I promise.

For more information, check out the book "Hummingbirds of Texas" by Clifford E. Shackelford, Madge M. Lindsay and C. Mark Klyn (2005, Texas A&M Press).

Extracurricular Events

By Dawn Stover

We've been busy beavers this spring! In addition to all of the ongoing programs and events, like Elyce's Arboretum Adventures and Bugs, Bees, Butterflies and Blossoms; Barb's annual azalea trail events and our ever-popular spring Garden Gala Day - we've made a real attempt to bring even more folks to the Garden Capital of Texas. You will have the pleasure of reading about the Azalea Society of America convention in Barb's article, but we also hosted the Texas Association of Botanical Garden and Arboreta annual conference this past February. TABGA consists of public-garden employees from across Texas, and we gather once a year to share our successes, as well as our failures in an attempt to entertain, enlighten and inspire our public garden allies. The gardens include small budget, volunteer-driven gardens, multi-million dollar venues, and everything in between. There's a wonderful spirit of connectivity and goodwill amongst the entire group...and we get to exchange plants!

This year, we hosted more than 80 participants from 14 different

public gardens, as well as a few nursery folks. We toured SFA Gardens, listened to garden updates and had a great evening out at The Liberty Bell in downtown Nacogdoches. We finished up with a plant swap, and all returned home with cool, new treasures.

Up next, Dr. Creech and I are going to try our luck with an event we are calling Industry Day: Wild About Woodies. We've scheduled the event to follow the Dallas Arboretum plant trial field day, as well as the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension at Overton field day. We are hoping to eventually have our own Texas-sized plant trials travel week, and that out-of-state industry folks

in town for the other trials (which are strictly herbaceous) will stick around for the woody shrub and tree side of horticulture.

We will have several southern horticulture experts, including Dr. David Creech from SFA, Dr. Allan Owings from LSU, Dr. Jim Robbins from UARK, Dr. Mengmeng Gu from TAMU, all speaking about plants of merit from their regions.

The best thing about these extracurricular events, in my opinion, is the personal exposure our students receive from folks in the horticulture industry. It's a great way to begin a lifetime of networking as the students grow as horticulturists!



Members of the Texas Association of Botanical Garden and Arboreta

Connecting Youth to Nature and the Community Through a Camera Lens

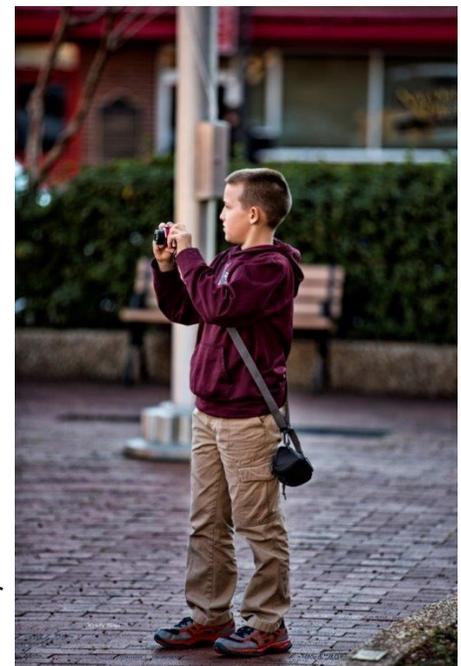
By Kerry Lemon

This spring a collaboration between Nacogdoches Naturally, Nacogdoches Photography Association and the Nacogdoches Boys and Girls Club introduced 12 youth to the wonders of photography as they explored their community, focusing on beauty and nature. Over an eight-week period, the group visited a variety of local natural areas, including the SFA Gardens and Pecan Park, as well as touring



the downtown Cole Art Center and the fire station. The young photographers were paired with mentors from the Nacogdoches Photography Association and given instruction in the use and handling of the camera, along with basic photography composition tips. They were then set free to wander and explore as they practiced seeing the world around them. Each week it was a delight to watch these youth, ranging from ages 9 to 13, enthusiastically experimenting with their camera to capture what they saw before them. The participants also had opportunities to review and edit their photographs. The best of their images were given to a panel of judges, selected by members of the photography association, who ranked them in the categories of nature, culture and tradition, portraits and best of show. Awards were presented to the budding young photographers during an award ceremony with family members at the monthly meeting of the photography club. A collection of the group's photographs will be displayed in an art opening at the Cole Art Center in late July and later entered in the National Boys and Girls Club photography contest.

This unique collaboration was a special opportunity for all involved—to use the eye of the camera to see the world and each other with a fresh perspective.



“A great photograph is one that fully expresses what one feels, in the deepest sense, about what is being photographed.”

-Ansel Adams

Education Goes Both Ways with the ASA

By Barb Stump

Many of you know, the SFA Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden co-hosted the Azalea Society of America national convention with the Texas Chapter of the ASA from March 26-29. This year's crowd of more than 80 people included about 15 American Rhododendron Society members from the Ozark Chapter. Most members of that chapter reside in Midwestern states, so it was great for them to see what our mid-South gardens offer and for us to learn about theirs. One of their member-growers, Ronnie Palmer, was a featured speaker on the evergreen Huang and Satsuki azaleas, which he grows in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and are plants located in our SFA Gardens, as well.

The participants loved our hospitality, as shown by a number of thank you notes we've received. Even though the convention was held the week before Easter—just before we really had our grand show of deciduous azaleas and evergreen Southern Indians—we had enough blooms among the 500 cultivated varieties to keep the ASA happy. These people are azalea gardeners for the long-term and are well aware of the problems late cold spring weather can cause. They definitely enjoyed all the blooms

they saw and knew the others would be wonderful too. A big bonus was the 700-foot-long lines of purple spider azaea, *Rhododendron stenopetalum* 'Koromo-shikibu,' that were in full bloom along University Drive. This was a surprise, because they typically bloom around the first of March and are often gone by the end of that month. Our cool/cold spring helped us out. Both Dr. Creech and I gave tours; I even received a compliment about how well-signed the Ruby M. Mize Garden was and how attendees enjoyed my "interpretation" about the gardens. They also really enjoyed seeing the Gayla Mize Garden's beginning stages (at five years) as compared to the Ruby M. Mize's maturity (at 18 years).

Also, because the attendees were experts in all things azalea, we had a big discussions about 'Geisha' and 'Festive' azaleas. Both are Glenn Dale Hybrids, and both were in full bloom that weekend in the Ruby M. Mize Garden. What I thought was 'Geisha'—in Bill Elliott's private garden—turns out to be 'Festive.' ASA members William C. Miller III, Dan Krabill and Don Voss, who have studied and grown these hybrids for a long time in the mid-Atlantic states, know this for a fact. 'Geisha' has purple stripes;

'Festive' has sectors and streaks of brilliant pink. I stand corrected, and want to share the photos they sent with you.



Glen Dale hybrid azalea 'Geisha' with distinct purple stripes



Glen Dale hybrid azalea 'Festive' with sectors and streaks of brilliant pink

Spring Blooms at the SFA Gardens





Come grow with us!

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Magic in the Garden: Little Princess Tea Party

By Kerry Lemon

Young princesses of Nacogdoches were treated to a delightful garden tea party in the Ruby M. Mize



Cheryl Boyette introduces a little princess to a monarch butterfly

Azalea Garden in March. With the theme of "The Snow Queen Re-imagined," the group was gifted with a visit from "Frozen's" Anna and Elsa, courtesy of SFA's School of Music voice students. Melissa Livingston Weaver offered storytelling, and volunteers helped with butterfly kisses, face painting and fairy magic all around. Many thanks to all the other wonderful partnerships, including Nacogdoches Junior Forum, Cheryl Boyette of Boyette Consulting, Kay Jeffrey, Wendy Floyd and SFA student assistants.



Vocal students from the SFA School of Music performed as Anna and Elsa from Disney's "Frozen"

