

SFA Gardens *News*

Volume 10, Issue 4

Winter 2015-16

Notes from the Director

By Dave Creech

Any serious gardener thinks deeply about the weather. I will remember 2015 for two remarkable floods in June and November, a long dry spell from August to November and a high rainfall total for the year with 56 inches. As for winter, it's been strange, as well. While our chilling hours under 45 F are good so far, our winter lows have dipped into the high 20s a few times. The fall foliage show never really ended, and February might have a surprise or two.

SFA Gardens has always been goal driven. Every year we write down our goals for the coming year, have a meeting, post the goals on our website, and every year about this time, we discuss our progress. Staff members think this process, which we call "performance review," provides great insight into where we've been, where we are and where we need to be. Most goals are met. Some are not. Failed goals are inspected, tossed, turned and revised. If the goals are still suitable, they move forward to the next year. If not, we discard that goal and

remark how we can't believe we even wrote it down as worth doing. Here's my prediction: 2016 is going to be a great year.

Which projects stand out for 2016? There's a new greenhouse in the works, which is a big deal. With the recent inclusion of intro crops as a core science

zens. For years this facility has served as a big source of plants for the two plant sales we have per year. This means space pressures. The good news is the university has approved our goal to construct a new greenhouse in a spot north of the Pineywoods Native Plant Center Horticulture facility.

We're here for the plants, and this year, we're into fruit in a big way. The muscadine trellis system is up at Jimmy Hinds Park, and we'll be planting 56 varieties of muscadine grapes there. We've been working on the collection for years and most are sitting happily in containers at the PNPC nursery. Besides building a collection of varieties,

our relationship with other programs across the South has brought in some exciting selection material. Our kiwi plantation has quadrupled in size. With two good crops under our belt, the first in Texas, we think we're perfectly poised to take a lead in evaluating the real potential of this exciting fruit in Texas.

Dawn and crew members



Andrew Tofury, Thomas Dimmit, Hunter Walker and Derek Calvert stand with the muscadine trellises in Jimmy Hinds Park.

course at SFA, there will be more students taking that course—hundreds per semester. More students means more labs and greater traffic. Areas such as the greenhouses and nursery pads at the horticulture facility behind the Agriculture Building will be used more frequently. This is nothing but exciting. We need to introduce horticulture to more of our youngest citi-

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STEPHEN F. AUSTIN
STATE UNIVERSITY

Arthur Temple College of
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Notes, *cont.*

have expanded the garden space for trialing at the north end of the SFA Mast Arboretum below the Jim and Beth Kingham pavilion on East College Street. This area will receive a great transfusion of new and exciting perennials, a few shrubs around the perimeter and vegetables in the

middle. The vegetable beds will connect with Elyce and Kerry's K-12 program, which makes perfect sense. Everyone agrees we need to introduce more of our youngest citizens to horticulture, gardening and being outdoors. Although we've been short staffed

lately, we expect to be back at full staff very soon. With all the good things we're doing, we need all hands on board. No matter what, our mantra will remain the same. Let's keep planting.

SATURDAY SEMINARS

Aug. 6: Seed Saving 101 - Learn the principles of seed collecting, saving, storing, treating and planting seeds for your home garden with Greg Grant in Seed Saving 101 from 9 a.m. to noon, Saturday, Aug. 6, in the Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Building, 2900 Raguet St. The event costs \$25 for SFA Gardens members and \$30 for non-members.

Sept. 10: Gifts from the Garden—Creating Herbal Soaps - Discover the cold press method for making soap with natural oils and ingredients from your herb garden with Elyce Rodewald in Gifts from the Garden—Creating Herbal Soaps. This class is scheduled for 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, Sept. 10, in the Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Building, 2900 Raguet St. The event costs \$25 for SFA Gardens members and \$30 for non-members.

Nov. 5: Container Gardening - Learn about container gardening with Sharon Smith of Blue Moon Gardens in her Container Gardening seminar from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, Nov. 5, in the Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Building, 2900 Raguet St. Create your own garden to take home. The event costs \$55 for SFA Gardens members and \$65 for non-members.

Dec. 3: Deck the Halls—Creating Evergreen Decorations for the Holidays - Join Dawn Stover, research associate at the SFA Mast Arboretum, to learn how to create elegant wreaths and garlands using materials from Mother Nature in the Deck the Halls—Creating Evergreen Decorations for the Holidays seminar. This event is scheduled for 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, Dec. 3, in the Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Building, 2900 Raguet St. The event costs \$25 for SFA Gardens members and \$30 for non-members. Participants can learn the principles of wreath, garland, and centerpiece construction and make a wreath to enjoy at home for the holidays.

**For reservations, contact sfagardens@sfasu.edu or (936) 468-1832.
For more information, visit our website <http://sfagardens.sfasu.edu>.**

Pretty in Purple

By Dawn Stover

Last year, I decided to jump on the kale bandwagon and was determined to grow every variety of kale I could find. Little did I know this would coincide with a worldwide kale shortage!

There are several large growers and wholesale suppliers that sell kale seeds to market growers and commercial seed suppliers. Several large growers experienced crop failures due to insect pressure or drought, and unfortunately, that coincided with an explosion in consumer demand for this vitamin-packed veggie. This led to one of the largest seed suppliers in the world simply running out of seeds to distribute.

That's when you get creative. Those seeds that were in short supply were the most popular varieties. Luckily, there are many more varieties available from independent seed companies, and we were shooting for unusual anyway. I was able to find around 20 varieties in all manner of shapes, sizes and flavors. Folks, kale isn't just the kale you find in the grocery store. It's much more!

A variety called 'Kaleidoscope Mix' surprised me more than any other. It's actually a hybrid between kale and Brussels sprouts and it is marketed as flower sprouts or kalettes. They're a perfect combination of sweet, nutty flavors and produce loose leaflets where you would normally find the tightly bundled Brussels sprouts. The 'Kaleidoscope Mix' offered green, silver and purple plants. The purple plants were nothing short of stunning and served as inspiration

for my winter color this year.

I chose to create an edible landscape in the color garden behind the glasshouse. And, in good SFA Lumberjack form, purple is the dominant color for the garden. Possibly the best attribute of this particular planting rests in our ability to pluck a leaf here or there



Ice crystals on 'Red Ursa' kale.

when we want a little snack or a lunch salad. I'm a huge fan of the concept of "foodscaping"—integrating edibles with ornamentals. Often, we don't give our edibles enough credit in the ornamental category, but there are truly some beautiful fruits and vegetables that deserve a place in landscape design.

The darkest purple foliage I experienced this winter was from several different vegetables. 'Rubins Purple' Brussels sprouts have dramatic, dark purple foliage, and although they aren't showing signs of

making sprouts, I am enamored with the plants. 'Blaril kohlrabi' presents vibrant purple bulbs above ground with equally attractive purple foliage. Kohlrabi is fairly new in my food vocabulary, but it's quite delicious and will definitely be a staple in the future. 'Red Ursa' kale is a frilly leafed variety with shades of silvery pink and purple that darkens with cold weather. Currently, our plants have a soft purple cast with hints of bluish silver. The frilled foliage adds a great texture to the more bold-foliaged kohlrabi and Brussels sprouts. Combine any of these with a bright yellow viola or pansy for a fantastic color recipe.

Several other varieties bring a vibrant, dark red touch to the landscape. 'Merlot' lettuce has quickly become my favorite variety, and it's the darkest red I've ever grown. It adds a unique dimension to the garden and to the salad bowl. 'Oscarde' lettuce impresses with its compact mahogany red foliage, and it makes a good candidate for the front of the border. These ruby-tinged edibles would pair well with the bright 'Orange Porcupine' calendula or 'Penny Orange Jump-Up' viola.

It's easy and fun to incorporate edibles into your ornamentals, especially those varieties with colorful foliage. Next, I'll experiment with summer fruits, so don't be surprised if you see a tomato tucked in with the *Tithonia*.

Winter Flowers

By Jared Barnes

I've been reading "The Art of Gardening" by Bill Thomas about Chanticleer, one of the top-rated botanic gardens in the U.S., and I came across a quote I love. Thomas writes, "A flower in winter is worth hundreds in the spring." The quote resonated with me because as someone who loves this stark season, I know it is hard to find color in the depths of winter. When we can find it, it is even more valuable.

We have had a warm winter in Nacogdoches, which has left us with many plants still in bloom or even blooming early. On my walks, I spy *Lantana* still in bloom, and many early *Narcissus* (daffodils) are almost finished flowering.

Still, I believe the more color, the better. In renovating the south side of the Agriculture Building for the new Sprout Garden, we planned and planted for winter blooms.

One flower that has brought brightness to the garden this winter has been *Erysimum* (wallflower). I first fell in love with this little annual when I visited England in 2010. A number of gardens like Sissinghurst and Snowhill Manor had several varieties of warmly colored wallflowers in bloom in May. I've rarely seen it in the Southeast, but we should change that! From looking at the Dallas Arboretum Trial website, I noticed they had success with 'Sugar Rush Red' and 'Sugar Rush Yellow.' We planted both of these cultivars, and they have been blooming for over a month now. The plants are about 12 inches tall, and they need to be planted densely for maximum impact. I would suggest a foot apart.

We also started some *Linaria hy-*

brida 'Enchantment' (toadflax) from seed. At first, I wasn't impressed with its open, lanky habit and small blooms, but after returning from winter break and finding it in full flower, it has grown on me. It's another short one, perhaps 12 inches tall. The flowers are a glowing magenta, similar to the intense pink colors you see in sunsets this time of year.



'Orange Porcupine' calendula growing in the Sprout Garden.

While ornamental flowers are beautiful, ones you can eat are even better. In the spirit of doing things differently, we grew purple, green and yellow cultivars of cauliflower in the Sprout Garden, and their yield surprised even me.

Our first cultivar ready to harvest was 'Veronica,' and the heads, larger than a softball, are a fascinating illustration of fractals. The charreuse-colored, cone-shaped curds

look like mini-Christmas trees repeating upon themselves over and over again. For the heads that matured later, 'Graffiti' and 'Purple of Sicily' showed SFA spirit with their pungent purple-colored heads. 'Cheddar' looked the color of cheddar cheese (but didn't taste like it), and 'Vitaverde' appeared the hue of a glowing Granny Smith apple. How did all the cultivars taste? Exquisite. I've learned it's important to get these in the ground around the first day of autumn to have a good yield.

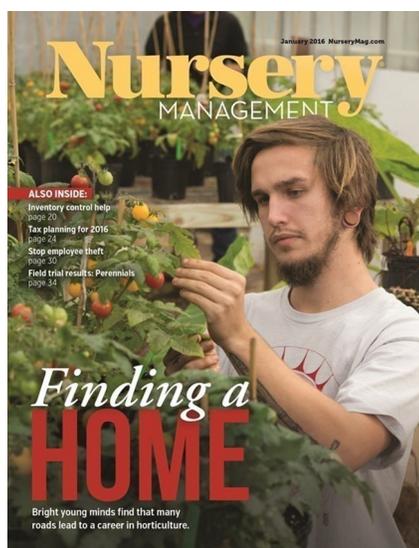
I tried a couple of varieties of *Calendula officinalis* (pot marigold or calendula). It was a flower I enjoyed during autumns in Tennessee, but it would eventually die with a hard freeze. My gut instinct told me these would grow most of the winter in Texas, and so far, they have. 'Orange Porcupine' has performed the best. In late January these are still covered at any one time with 4 to 8 perky orange flowers per plant. We also tried the cultivar 'Neon.' I think it is more susceptible to the cold because, at the time of writing, each plant had only one flower (or none). Still, when it does flower, the blooms are unique because they have hints of maroon shading. Calendula is edible and adds a splash of bright color to winter salads. It also can be used medicinally as horticulture student Hunter Walker recently showed my fruit and vegetable production class in a demo of making calendula lip balms.

While I'm enjoying the color now, I'm already contemplating more flowers for next winter. I hope I've inspired you to begin planning for hundreds of flowers for the next cold season, as well.

Horticulture Superstars

By Dawn Stover

Several of our horticulture students were recently featured in the January 2016 issue of Nursery Management magazine. The article, "Finding a Home," focused on what draws young people to study horticulture at the university level and offered several of our students the opportunity to tell why they chose a career path in horticulture.



Hunter Walker makes the front cover of Nursery Management magazine.

Hunter Walker, SFA junior, credits his mother's and grandparents' Native American roots as his inspiration. Chisolm Tessem, SFA

junior from Plano, Texas, said he is drawn to the possibilities of combining his interests in mechanical engineering and food production because of the innovative farming technologies. Rene Bhattacharya, SFA senior from Pasadena, Texas, is here to learn the science of plants



Clockwise from top left: Thomas Dimmit, Becca Burnett, Chanelle Angeny and Rene Bhattacharya pose in the Sprout Garden.

before she pursues a master's degree in landscape architecture.

Despite the differences in backgrounds and pathways to horticulture, our students find two prevalent concepts at SFA—we are passionate about horticulture, and we practice what we preach. The hands-on learning opportunities our students receive are invaluable, and students often increase their practi-

cal application through employment in SFA Gardens or the Sprout Garden. Employers in our industry understand SFA graduates know their plants and are willing to roll up their sleeves and go to work.



Hunter Jahnke and Dr. Jared Barnes pose in the shade garden of the Mast Arboretum.

Kelli Rodda, editor of the Nursery Management, contacted Dr. Jared Barnes looking for horticulture students to interview and photograph for the article. University photographer Hardy Meredith staged a photo shoot last December, and the rest is history recorded in a seven-page magazine layout that will garner national exposure for our students and our program. Barnes said he is proud of the magazine and opportunity, and quite frankly, we are too. Way to go SFA horticulture!

Little Princess Tea Party

SFA Gardens is hosting a Little Princess Tea Party from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, April 9, in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden.

Please join charming flower fairies for a delightful party with treats, music and merriment among the enchanting trees and azaleas of the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden.

Wear your favorite princess or fairy apparel and enjoy a magical day in the garden.

This event is recommended for princesses ages 3-10 accompanied by adults.

Tickets cost \$25 per person and can be purchased online at <http://sfagardens.sfasu.edu>.

For more information, email sfagardens@sfasu.edu or call (936) 468-1832.

Winter Treasures

By Dawn Stover

Sometimes the shyest, quietest individuals have the most unique and wonderful talents. That holds true for plants, too. In mid-winter, when days swing from mild and sunny to cold and wet, there are plants that remind us spring is within reach. Their sweet, gentle yet tantalizing fragrance, sneaks through the garden like a slow-moving fog that envelops you in its delicate grip before you realize you're captive. These bashful bloomers are seldom noticed for the beauty of their flowers. They are easily overlooked, as the flowers are often small and lack bright colors. Their intoxicating fragrance politely commands attention, and garden visitors can be seen sniffing the air looking for the bouquet's origin.

Perhaps the most ordinary out-of-flower plant is the fragrant wintersweet, *Chimonanthus praecox*. In the fourth edition of his "Manual of Woody Landscape Plants," Dr. Michael Dirr notes the plant "does not overwhelm one in fall," and the primary ornamental characteristic is its fragrance. The "flowers are never overwhelming but when backlit by the sun almost sparkle." I'd say that's a pretty fair assessment. I promise you would walk by this plant without noticing it for 11 months but stop in January mid-step when it perfumes the crisp winter air. The little, waxy-yellow flowers are somewhat unimpressive but are abundant, and coupled with their aroma, are impressive enough to want to tuck it into any landscape. Dirr lists the plant's ultimate size as 10 feet tall, 8 feet wide, but our ma-

ture specimens are just shy of that measurement at 2 feet tall, 2 feet wide in each direction. He also recommends cutting shrubs that have grown leggy to 6 inches tall in late winter in order to refresh the shape.



Prunus mume 'Bonita' presents fragrant blooms.

A new fragrance at the Mast Arboretum comes from a rare deciduous magnolia from the Tienmu Mountains of China. Discovered in 1933, *Magnolia amoena* is one of the last wild magnolias. Its status is vulnerable due to habitat fragmentation and over collection of flower buds for medicinal purposes. Our specimen arrived in 2010, and it has been planted for almost five years. The trees will eventually reach 25 to 40 feet tall, however, ours still have a lot of growing to do. The mild winter has encouraged flowers to open with only minimal recent-freeze

losses. I discovered enough of the smallish blooms to realize we had escaped devastating freeze damage. Most deciduous magnolias aren't terribly fragrant, so I walked on without a second thought. The two-inch flowers are pleasant but not terribly remarkable. However, I was not giving credit to the blossoms in front of me. It was a nice surprise to find the magnolias were the source of a very pleasing and clear fragrance.

Lastly, there's the Japanese flowering apricot, *Prunus mume*. This small tree packs a powerful visual display to complement its sweet perfume. My son and I were walking the garden on a warm, sunny afternoon and smelled a wonderful fragrance. We sniffed our way across the landscape to find an explosion of dark pink flowers on our 'Bonita' selection. I have long admired the white flowering apricot in the arboretum parking lot, and I've since found quite a few varieties like the pink 'Bonita' that seems to be

one of the earlier blooming selections. In my experience, the flowers have been remarkably frost tolerant. My goal is to collect all the varieties I can locate and plant them along the LaNana Creek Trail in an East Texas version of the cherry blossoms in Washington D.C.

If you find a warm and sunny winter afternoon, come visit SFA Gardens, and let your nose be your guide. The fragrant floral offerings are just beginning. Soon, the winter daphne and jonquil will join the chorus as the garden continues to awaken from its winter rest.

Fall Family Camping Adventure

By Kerry Lemon

What does a beautiful fall weekend bring to mind—colorful leaves, hiking in the woods or sitting around the fire with family and friends?

Last fall, the Nacogdoches Naturally program offered a family overnight camping trip the weekend before Thanksgiving. Five families attended with a total of six adults and eight youth, as well as seven SFA Gardens staff members and volunteers. The group visited Mission Tejas State Park, which was built in 1934 by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Originally, Mission Tejas State Park was built as a commemorative representation of Mission San Francisco de los Tejas, the first Spanish mission in the province of Texas.

After the initial camp set-up, the evening began with a campfire program on fire building and safety by Park Ranger and Interpreter, Josh Crawford. Once the campfire was going, we gathered around for a delicious meal of chili, hot dogs and cornbread. A group of night hikers explored the campground and returned to sit by the fire, tell stories and roast marshmallows for the obligatory yummy s'mores to top off the evening.

A brief light rain fell in the night, but the group awoke to the singing of birds. Pancakes and apple crisps were on the breakfast menu with more fire sitting, of course. After cleanup and break down, the children began working diligently on their junior ranger activity journals



in hopes of completing the requirements to earn their Junior Ranger badge.

They finished just in time to head up the hill and join Ranger Josh at the mission for an entertaining and educational program on the history of the mission, park and Camino Real. The discussion ended with a short hike on the actual Camino that has been walked on for hundreds of years.

We lunched at the playground and hiked around the fishing pond before heading to meet Ranger Josh at the Park Headquarters to turn in journals and be sworn in as official Junior Rangers. It was a full, eventful day, and there is still more to do on the next visit. This was a first-time camping experience for these families and their first visit to this wonderful historical Texas Park. Clearly, it was a grand adventure for them and there was much enthusiasm to return and try camping on their own.

This outdoor adventure was made possible through a Texas Parks and Wildlife CO-OP grant in collaboration with SFA Gardens' educational programs. It is gratifying to share unique experiences in nature with youth and their families. It is always our hope that they will carry these memories with them and be encouraged to venture out on their own nature adventures.

For more information about our Family Outdoor Adventures, please contact Kerry Lemon at (936) 468-1832 or lemonkb@sfasu.edu.



Come grow with us!

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Heads up for Spring Vegetable Gardening with Kids

By Kerry Lemon

This spring the Nacogdoches Naturally after-school program will include vegetable gardening as part of our program activities. We have been collaborating with Dawn and Duke to use the inner beds on East College Street below the children's gazebo for our garden planting.



From past experiences, we know children from the Boys and Girls Club love getting their hands in the soil and growing food. We will be using curriculum from the Learn, Grow, Eat & Go program developed by Texas A&M AgriLife as part of the Junior Master Gardner program. Children will have opportunities to plant, taste, cook and learn about gardening basics through fun, hands-on games and activities.

We are excited to add this element to our current program and to utilize part of the existing SFA Mast Arboretum beds for our venture. Keep your eyes open for small hands in the garden growing delicious vegetables!

