

SFA Gardens News

Volume 9, Issue 2

Summer 2014

Notes from the Director

By David Creech

I don't know where to begin. First, I'm in shock over the sudden loss of our good friend George Millard. Like everyone here, I was caught off guard. Tragedies like this drive many of us to pause; to recognize what's important in life and what's not. When in a bout with the black dog of sadness, I usually take to the garden to sort it all out. I was pruning my way through a stretch of the Gayla Mize Garden when I ran into our 7 foot tall *Franklinia alatamaha*, and saw that it was

about to bloom, a first at SFA Gardens. Discovered by John and William Bartram in 1765, this flowering shrub was first found along the Alatamaha River near Fort Barrington, in what was then the British colony of Georgia. Bartram's notes reflected the rarity of the tree, only one location ever seen. Reports over the next few decades documented its ultimate extinction in the wild. Whether it was habitat degradation or *Phytophthora* infection from the giant cotton plantations in the area, it doesn't matter.

The end result was extinction in the wild. However, there was a life raft. Seeds from the colony, collected in 1777, were successfully germinated in Pennsylvania, and from that, the tree survived. No telling how many



The beautiful and rare flower of *Franklinia alatamaha*

of this "rare and elegant flowering shrub" I have killed. In our region, this is not an easy plant to grow. The trail of stories about having it, growing it, and losing it is a long one. It's a Holy Grail tree to many plant obsessed friends. To me, flowering this plant is right up there with some of SFA Gardens other well-known firsts – flowering *Amorphophallus titanum* (our 2004 fragrant giant corpse flower), *Stewartia malacodendron* (silky camellia), *Meliodendron xylocarpum* (a rare *Syrax* relative from

China, first to flower in USA) and *Emmenopterys henryi* (a rare Chinese flowering tree) were all inspiring moments in our history. Our *Franklinia* joins this list. For some reason, this *Franklinia* landed in just the right spot, decided to jump out of the ground, and bloomed exactly when I needed cheering up the most.

Some really good news! A big hello and welcome aboard to Dr. Jared Barnes. He's our new assistant professor of horticulture and a recent doctoral graduate of North Carolina State University. It's great to have him on board. It won't be boring. Everyone can rest assured I've explained the requirements to him. It should be a simple job. All he has to do is inspire students, take on some interesting studies and get them funded and published, and work tirelessly for the fruit, vegetable, nursery, greenhouse and landscape industries. In the first month, Jared will learn the ultimate chain of command at this institution of higher learning. It will be a piece

Cont. on p. 7

Meet Dr. Barnes

By Dawn Stover

Most of you know there's a fresh new face in our horticulture department. Dr. Jared Barnes, assistant professor of horticulture, arrived in Texas in early July. Dr. Creech and I assisted Jared with moving in. We arrived just in time to help unload his plant collection, which filled an entire truck bed and interior of a Ford Escape! We knew then that good things were sure to come.

Jared has accomplished more in his young life than most of us mere mortals. He grew up in West Tennessee and found a passion for plants early on, as a five-year-old corn and tomato gardener. At 15 years old, he decided to join the local Master Gardener group and remained active for seven years. In addition, Jared worked on sweet potato farm two years until leaving for college. He attended the University of Tennessee at Martin, where he worked at a perennial retail and landscape nursery. He later enrolled at North Carolina State University for graduate school. His master's degree focused on how to characterize nutrient disorders of floriculture crops, which resulted in information for growers to diagnose issues in their own nursery and greenhouse settings. His doctoral work involved quantifying factors that influence substrate pH levels, which led to the development of predictive mod-

els for grower use. His dissertation earned the 2014 Krezdorn Award from the American Society of Horticultural Science. He also was the recipient of an astonishing 14 scholarships totaling more than \$20,000 throughout his college career.

Jared has traveled to 10 foreign



countries for horticulture; has spoken at national conventions such as Farwest, Cultivate and the North Carolina Green and Growin' show; and written for publications including *Hometown*, *Conifer Quarterly*, *HortScience*, *HortTechnology*, *Carolina Gardener* and *Fine Gardening*. He was recently featured in *Organic Gardening's* Next Generation, an exclusive list of young horticulturists who are predicted to have lasting impacts in horticulture.

Despite this laundry list of accomplishments, Jared is a refreshingly cheerful and passionate young man who simply wants to teach horticulture—to SFA students and anyone else who is interested! His goal is to change the culture of horticulture through the way he educates people about plants. Personally, I'm already inspired and we've only been working together a few short weeks. Jared has an alter ego, complete with costume - "Superseed," has a penchant for ice cream, wears bow ties and loves to swing dance. He carries a tune in his pocket and is quick to offer a hardy laugh during good conversation.

Jared is very interested in trialing plants and teaching, which provides a good fit for him and the SFA Gardens. We plan to expand the vegetable trial area along the LaNana Creek trail where he will take our perennial trials to a new level. He also will take an active role as the SFA Horticulture Club adviser, helping them raise money for horticulturally related travel across the U.S.—maybe even the world!

The future is bright at the SFA Gardens, but it just got a great deal brighter with our newest faculty member. We can't wait to see what's in store.



SOLAR SATURDAY

IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE FABULOUS FALL FESTIVAL - OCTOBER 4

SOLAR OVEN CONSTRUCTION * SOLAR COOKING * SOLAR S'MORES * SOLAR ARRAY DEDICATION * SOLAR SEMINAR FOR ADULTS * SFA STEEL DRUM BAND * CAKE

Remembering a Great Friend

By David Creech

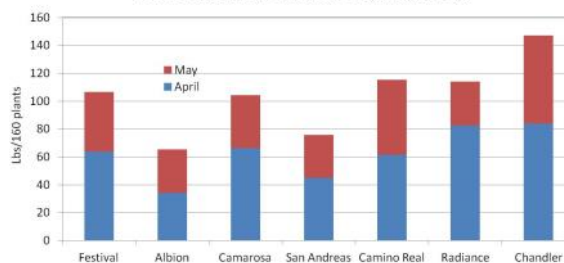
On a sad note, we lost a special friend of the SFA Gardens family, and long-time icon in Nacogdoches, George Millard. While George was nearly 83, he had a joy to learn, and more importantly, to do. When you look up the word “giving” in the dictionary, you’re looking at George Millard.

With a Texas Department of Agriculture grant from more than 20 years ago, George became our favorite cooperator. For three years, we tested a wide range of Asian vegetables in spring, summer and fall. Strange and not-so-strange vegetables were part of the study – varieties of Chinese cabbage, bok choy, kai lan, eggplants, bitter melon, daikon, Chinese yard-long beans and others. Keep in mind, George was running a big poultry farm as well as doing other things. He had never farmed vegetables, but once he got hooked, he was in. When the three year project ended, George never quit. He switched to conventional vegetables and became a favorite cooperator with us, as well as Texas A&M University. Dr. Bill Long, our Ag. Mechanics professor, George and myself designed a poly mulch and drip tape laying machine. George adopted injection of soluble fertilizers through a drip system to tweak his crops into production. He took care of diseases, insects and weeds with the latest pesticides and application strategies. He incorporated frost fabric, to protect young crops from spring freezes. When the opportunity for strawberries arrived on the scene, he was on board. In



fact, this spring’s crop included another trial. This time with Dr. MengMeng Gu, extension specialist at TAMU. Not long ago, George and I were looking at the data; data he had entered himself into Excel involving seven varieties (160 plants per variety), yield and quality by harvest date. The data represents strawberries picked, packed and marketable. Chandler, the variety that has been standard at this farm for years, came out the winner with nearly a pound per plant. When you think, strawberry plant numbers can reach 25,000 per acre - well, you do the math! Exciting stuff.

2014 Strawberry Production, Geoge Millard Farm



I recall stories that are representative of George. A long time ago, we vegetable gardened at the north end of the Mast Arboretum. George asked if we would like some poultry litter. Never turning

down a good thing, I said, “yes.” Well, a big spreader truck arrived, made a few runs, and in the blink of an eye we had four tons of litter across our one-acre patch. I admit, it was a bit windy and, yes, the litter was perhaps a bit fragrant! It wasn’t but a few minutes before I got the first of several phone calls from SFA administrators. Something was stinking up the campus, and I was responsible. There were feathers floating everywhere. A strange odor was enveloping the campus. Students were checking the bottoms of their shoes. It was an incident. George told me to tell folks to relax, because the smell would go away quickly and that it smelled like money. I didn’t do that, but I did promise the smell would subside, and I’d never, ever do it again. I wasn’t fired, and the veggies grew like gangbusters.

That was George. He made things happen. Five years ago, I installed an experiment at the Hayter Blueberry Farm. We were interested in testing plants grown with DeWitt weed barrier versus a bed of pine mulch. I had intended to visit the Millard farm, load up the poly mulch layer, haul it to the Hayter’s and get the job done. Instead, George gathered a few workers, the tractor and mulch layer, and the chore was done in a few hours. He was part of the SFA Gardens and Nacogdoches family, an icon at the farmers market, and someone who affected all of us in a positive way. I will miss him. I’m sure he’s in heaven right now, eyeing a nice patch of sandy loam and wondering if there’s an irrigation source nearby.

SFA Pineywoods Camp Still Going Strong!

By Kerry Lemon

Over the past 13 years, Elyce Rodewald and I have operated an outdoor nature summer camp for youth. The camp program provides an environment where young people have a chance to learn *about* nature, *from* nature while experiencing the inherent challenges and joys of being outside. The youth that come through our camps participate in a special kind of experience. This experience allows and encourages them to immerse themselves in the natural world and all that it has to offer. SFA Pineywoods Camp is centered on the concepts of respect of self, others and the natural world. Our activities are nature-based focusing on appreciation of plants, animals, the elements and outdoor skills. It is a camp where youth and adults are challenged by choice to stretch beyond limits, to develop new skills,



and to commit fully to being present with nature.

It is difficult to paint a picture

that fully captures the depth of being at camp for four weeks with these enthusiastic young people. Each age group offers a unique and delightful experience, from the youngest 4-6 year-olds with their boundless joyful energy, to the inquiring minds and eager hands of our 7-11 year-olds and, finally, the 12-15 year-olds and their increased skills, emerging maturity and focus on independence and personal relationships.

Many of our campers begin with us in Wonder Woods and continue attending all the way through Wilderness Adventures. Watching this growth and change over the years is nothing short of miraculous.

One special treat this year was the large osprey nest sitting atop a tall pine snag on Lake Naconiche. All our canoers paddled by and heard mama and papa osprey give gentle warning calls as they protected their family. This was just one example of the many real and up-close encounters with wildlife as part of the Pineywoods camp. It also was a cooler than normal summer with unpredictable rain that we managed to dodge for the most part. The reduced heat was applauded but there was the added aspect of stifling humidity and swarms of mosquitoes blessing us with their hungry, aggressive presence.

Our campers were tough outdoor adventurers most of the time. After a long hike through the steamy Jack Creek forest, I overheard one member of the "Bird Watching Rock Stars" comment, "It's okay - I'm building character!" At the end of one hot, dirty day spent in the woods, another camper

declared loudly, "I Just LOVE nature camp!" Then on the final afternoon of all the camps, heading home in the van with five teenage girls, one of them asked in absolute seriousness if there was any way that wilderness camp could last for two weeks next year, "One week just



isn't long enough!"

I am always amazed and heartened at how our campers enjoy camp in spite of the heat, mosquitoes, bugs, sweat, dirt, physical demands, and personal challenges. Those of us who participate in summer camp come away with an understanding of what it means to overcome obstacles and hang in for the long haul. Staff members, volunteers and campers all gain an appreciation of the benefits reaped from committing fully to an experience. Being outside in nature provides many wonders to marvel at and enriching opportunities for growth and expansion. We leave camp having strengthened our

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Camp, cont.

connections and feeling more competent and confident in our abilities, with a sense of accomplishment and



exhilaration. We are looking forward to next year!

SFA Pineywoods Camp is a group effort. This year, 93 youth were served with 19 need-based scholarships awarded (made possible by our many generous donors, including the Nacogdoches Junior Forum). This was accomplished through the hard work and devotion of 10 staff members, one international intern, SFA Campus Recreation and Outdoor Pursuits program

assistance, 10 community volunteers, seven parent volunteers, and continued support from the SFA and Nacogdoches communities.



Some like it hot!

By Dawn Stover

I recently attended Cultivate'14, a trade show and conference hosted by AmericanHort in Columbus, Ohio. It was a wonderful experience chocked full of excellent educational sessions, and a phenomenal trade show that included a healthy dose of annual and perennial vendors. Color me happy! I had an awesome time, learned a great deal, made many professional connections and returned inspired.

I came home realizing that everyone should have a "story." When you wear many hats, it's easy to lose track of your story. I sure did, but I'm happy to say I returned from Cultivate with a purpose and a story!

I chose to go to Cultivate this year because I've become a little disillusioned with my primary professional organization: the Perennial Plant Association. As gardeners in warm climates we are more concerned with perennials that survive our hot humid summers than we are with winter hardiness. This need is grossly overlooked within the PPA and I've struggled with whether or not to continue membership. The proverbial nail in the

coffin came at Cultivate when visiting with one of my perennial vendors about starter plants of *Salvia* 'Amistad.' It is a beautiful salvia with dark purple flowers born from nearly black calyces on long flower spikes. It's hardy in the United States Department of Agriculture's hardiness zones 8-11, it's forgiving



Velvety purple blooms of *Salvia* 'Amistad' at the Dallas Arboretum

of our summers; is pest and disease resistant; produces flowers non-stop from spring until frost; attracts hummingbirds; and sings "Polly Wolly Doodle" all the day long! I was told by that vendor they only carry real perennials. Huh? According to the Royal Horticulture Society, the definition of herbaceous perennial is: a *plant that lives*

*more than three years, does not form woody stems and often dies down in winter. Why then is *Salvia* 'Amistad' not a "real" perennial?*

To further cement the credibility of my "story," I searched online for "perennials for the deep south." The first source from a nationally known magazine included lilyturf, cast iron plant, yellow flag iris, and phlox "selections." Really? Is that as good as it gets? The answer is a plain and simple "NO," and so I'm eager to explore the wide world of heat tolerant perennials and expand our options. We won't let those zone 6 gardeners bully us around anymore! No more hosta, huechera or astilbe for us! We're going to garden with plants that are as happy as we are to live in the South. (Take that with a grain of salt and a pinch of humidity!)

I'll feature these plants in future newsletters, and we will continue to offer superior selections at our bi-annual plant sales. I'm still having troubles locating a source for 'Amistad.' It's very easy to propagate, but patent laws tell me I can't do that. When I can, you bet I'll grow it for the plant sales!

Wild About Design

By Greg Grant

We all want beautiful landscapes, right? In addition to making our world look prettier, they also make us feel better. And of course it would be nice if we all used native plants which are generally more adapted, more regionally appropriate and help to support local wildlife.

As much as I love flowers, when it comes to the landscape, the design is more important than the plants - native or otherwise. After all, it doesn't just matter how pretty individual plants look. They have to be in the right place. Try planting some under the power line or between the parking space and the door entrance door and see what happens. Although I try not to be a landscape critic, it's painfully obvious driving the roads of Texas that we aren't all trained in landscape design. And it's no wonder why. Have you looked at a landscape design book lately or sat through a design seminar? Who can remember all those rules? There are just too darn many. I'm quite convinced most folks can only remember as many things as they have fingers on one hand. And that's on a good day!

In my opinion, any list of design rules that exceeds five is doomed to failure. I've listened to experts extol the virtues of as many as a dozen "essential" landscape design principles and/or elements. Some seem to be completely unnecessary while others are often duplications. Therefore, I've come up with the five truly essential design principles that should be considered - whether landscape, interior, floral or fashion design.

So, if you've got five fingers, why

not learn these simple rules? Give yourself a hand and start counting.

Balance. Balance is the equalization of visual weight from one area of the landscape to another. All landscapes should be balanced. Each angle you view should be weighted as if it were perched on a balance beam. If the majority of the plants and structures are all located

tion on either side of the center. In other words, a few large trees on one side of the yard balanced out by a group of medium-sized shrubs, a large mass of small shrubs and a garden structure on the other side of the yard. This type of balance is a bit trickier to understand. But if you visualized the balance beam it makes it easier.



on one side of the yard, then your landscape is probably out of balance. There are two general types of balance - symmetrical and asymmetrical. Symmetrical (formal) balance is the same arrangement of objects on one side of the landscape as the other; therefore creating a mirror image. This is the most appropriate for formal designs and is obvious to most observers. Asymmetrical (informal) balance is still equal visual weight, but the same materials are not repeated in the same quantity or relative posi-

Scale (proportion). Scale is the size relationship of individual parts to other parts, and the relationship of each part to the whole. In establishing scale within the landscape, the human being is the measure of all things. All aspects of the design must be in scale with people. This means no landscape for giants or elves! If your house and yard are big, you need big beds, big plants and big masses. On the other hand, if you have a tiny home on a tiny lot, more diminutive plants and beds are in order.

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Design, *cont.*

Dominance (focal point).

Dominance is the authority of one feature of a design composition to all other parts. Due to the dominant object's size, shape, texture or location, all other parts of the composition are subordinate to it. This principle should be used sparingly. As a rule, there should be only one dominant feature in each view. It's too hard to look at more than one at a time. Most people try to cram numerous focal points into every yard. This makes as much sense as wearing every piece of jewelry you own at the same time. Bold textures, bright colors and fanciful objects often serve as focal points. Try to keep the area around them more subdued to help show them off. Another way to remember this is, for every "busy" thing you do you must accompany it with something plain, simple or mundane to offset it.

Repetition. Repetition is the technique of using one feature, shape, color or theme throughout a composition. I consider repetition to be the most important design principle of all. If you can only remember one thing (on one finger)

remember this one! The repetition of the element at different locations in the design provides a common tie or visual link among the various parts. Repetition helps establish unity or harmony. Repetition is achieved by minimizing the number of different elements and materials used in a design composition. Although it's very tempting, it's not a good idea to use every plant, color and ornament you see at your local garden center. For example, choose one type of edging and go with it. Your yard shouldn't be a showroom for Home Depot! Think of a patchwork quilt held together by a common border and thread. Everybody seems to know to repeat color, trim and shapes in the house, but most gardeners seem to think there's a rule against using anything more than once outside. It's hard to visually digest a busy, haphazard landscape. It's best to think of everybody viewing your landscape from a moving car. As a rule, keep the overall concept simple and easy to understand. Oak Alley Plantation in South Louisiana basically has one color (green) and one plant (live oak), planted in two straight lines

leading to the white house, and it's one of the most photographed landscapes I've ever visited. As Momma used to tell me, "there's nothing wrong with being simple."

Unity. Unity is the harmonious relationship among all elements and characteristics of a design. Unity exists when all the pieces of a composition logically relate to one another. No element should seem out of place or inappropriate. This principle is a bit harder to explain. Basically, no matter what portion of the landscape you stand in, it should still feel like it belongs to the rest. I try to make sure not to use modern plastic in my old fashioned landscape because it looks out of place. If you follow rules one through four, unity will happen on its own.

Some say rules are made to be broken. I'm not known for following many, myself. But I suggest you follow these. These five design principles have been in practice for hundreds of years all over the world and are proven winners. And remember, it doesn't matter whether you are using native plants, exotic plants, or toothpicks: design is design.

Fabulous Fall Festival - Oct. 4, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Notes, *cont.*

of cake.

SFA Horticulture is adventure-some horticulture. Of course there is a lot to learn. I often say a university garden is all about plants, plans and people. Actually, it's all about people. I realized a few days ago that our garden world at SFA is nearly thirty years old. We are sur-

vivors where others fail in the long run. To me, the bright side is there's still no garden complacency here. Nope, monotony remains our enemy. One of my friends described his university garden as one with too many moving parts, all of them moving in new directions, unsure of the end goal. When I

look out the window of my office, I see SFA Gardens busting at the seams – more plants, plans, and people than ever before, fun projects underway, and a garden tribe determined to take this ship to the next level. Where that exactly is, I'm not so sure. I just know it'll be good. Let's keep planting.



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Come grow with us!

Walking on Sunshine By Elyce Rodewald

Our 12.75 kilowatt-hour array will have 51 polycrystalline panels with Enphase micro inverters providing advanced solar technology to the Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Building. We estimate 60 to 80 percent of the electricity for the building will be provided by the solar installation. The array was provided through a grant from the Green Mountain Energy Sun Club. The Green Mountain Energy Sun Club's mission is to crowdfund, build and promote solar power while assisting nonprofit organizations with a socially responsible focus to reduce their electricity costs. Thanks to contributions from Green Mountain Energy and their customers, employees and supporters, the Sun Club has helped to install more than 650 kwh of solar power at nonprofits since



2002. Sixty unique projects supporting more than 55 organizations have been completed by the Sun Club. The array on the Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Building at the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center is being installed by NATiVE team members: Chris Renner, solar operations manager; Mike Arroyo, project manager; John Henry, electrician; and Kevin Dunn, technician/singer/song writer.