



SFA Gardens NEWS

Notes from the Director

By Dr. David Creech

After a blistering cold winter and plenty of rain, spring has finally arrived. While many of our edgiest plants suffered in the cold temperatures, we have a great year ahead. I call it the “glory of the garden.” The magnolia collection has been superb. Camellias came through unscathed, and even those early japonicas went ahead and bloomed in glorious fashion. The azaleas are poised for another great year. Thomas Jefferson’s quote still resonates: “No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden.”

Janet is right. I’ve been traveling too much. I’ve taken three trips to the East Coast for talks. There’s the usual spring rush of talks for Master Gardeners, garden clubs and plant-oriented symposiums. Spreading the gospel of adventuresome horticulture is part of our mission at SFA Gardens. One of our volunteers remarked that it’s through travel that our connections have been built. He’s right. SFA Gardens has evolved from a small patch of plants with nothing to share to a diverse garden with amazing specimens and plenty to share. One of my habits during the last three decades has been to hand out rare and unusual plants. It

amazes me how many have languished, been ignored or withered away in the container. However, there are those that have found a home in the right spot, and years later, I will get an email or enjoy a conversation about a particular plant. I received an email from someone who attended a talk I made in 2011 at Davidson College in North Carolina. She asked if I remembered giving her a Mexican sugar maple at the symposium, and she wanted me to know it had performed beautifully and asked if I’d like a picture of the tree. I didn’t remember, but I did want a picture. Scattering plants like Mardi Gras beads over a range of southern landscapes is a noble thing to do. Plant enthusiasts have learned SFA Gardens will do its best to give a rare plant a home.

Chris Dempsey is now SFA’s arborist. This position fits Chris’ talents perfectly as he is an SFA forestry graduate, a certified arborist and is working on a master’s degree at SFA. While we hate to lose him at SFA Gardens, this is a great

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opportunity for a certified arborist. The campus is packed with trees, and the backlog of work ahead is formidable. Hazardous trees and branches are everywhere and will soon be getting his attention. Chris will be deeply involved in getting the university back to planting more trees on campus. While the campus forest remains one of the best in Texas, it desperately needs a surge of new plantings on the ground. Chris is part of that movement.

To say our SFA Gardens team is busy would be an understatement. Dawn Stover is juggling myriad chores, speaking engagements and producing the crop for our upcoming plant sale. Jordan Cunningham is helping bring in the crop and move us forward on a number of contract grow liner opportunities. The biggest challenge is space. We're excited that a new three-bay, 7,200-square-foot Quonset greenhouse is in the works. The process will be a chapter in my memoirs. Stay tuned.

Elyce Rodewald and Jocelyn Moore continue to run our youngest citizens through the environmental education program. I see a renewed spirit in the school garden arena.

Connecting our children to gardening and the environment is not a chore, it's a duty. Elyce and Jocelyn couldn't have a better team of volunteers and student assistants.

The Brundrett Conservation Education Building remains a beehive of activity, and Anne Sullivan, SFA Gardens administrative assistant, is taking it up a notch. She is responsible mainly for keeping me out of trouble. While some think that's a full-time job, it's not. She takes care of our accounting and manages the bookings, set up and take down of weddings, events, gatherings and meetings here. We will soon be adding two new outdoor pedestal lights for nighttime events.

Duke Pittman manages the student assistants involved in landscape maintenance, new plantings and the irrigation system. Malcolm Turner is in charge of our Moody Gardens project, the blueberry patch, the Jimmy Hinds Park, figs, kiwis, and the nursery we manage at the grounds and bus barn. It's easy to see we have an important role in keeping our gardens productive and healthy. Until next time, let's keep planting.

The rare *Magnolia amoena* in the SFA Mast Arboretum



Camellia reticulata 'Frank Houser'



Measuring Chills: Then and Now

By Dr. David Creech

This has been one of the coldest winters in recent history. This January, we suffered two consecutive nights where temperatures fell to 10 degrees Fahrenheit, and we endured terrible stretches of freezing temperatures. These frigid temperatures have an effect on our gardens. For example, most temperate fruits have a chilling requirement. In horticulture, we typically measure cold by keeping track of hours less than 45 degrees Fahrenheit.

In the old days, we measured chilling hours by using a clunky, expensive instrument called a thermograph. We placed it under a white-roofed shelter outside. When I was a youngster at Texas A&M University working in the

horticulture department, it was my weekly charge to gather the thermograph data. I'd change the paper roll out weekly, make sure the ink was flowing, and I'd turn a key to get the instrument wound. For the next week, the instrument's pen would glide across the slowly moving graph paper leaving a record of the temperatures. At the end of the week, I'd collect the graph paper and the process would repeat itself. At the end of winter, I'd gather the graphs, draw a straight line at the 45-degree mark on the Y-axis and count all the hours less than 45 degrees. It was tedious. Times have changed. Now, we buy a small pen-shaped, low-cost instrument that does it all automatically. Basically, these



A field of 'Emerald' blueberries braves the cold in Southeast Texas in February.

waterproof data loggers are hung in the garden. At the end of winter, they can be plugged into a USB slot in the computer, and we have a terrific graph of temperatures. The more expensive versions can measure humidity and other climate parameters.

Last year, we accumulated 375 hours less than 45 degrees Fahrenheit. This winter, there have been more than 1,050 hours. We “normally” receive about 650 hours. That impacts many trees, particularly fruit trees. For instance, Golden Delicious apples need about 1,200 hours of chilling

to successfully push flower and fruit buds. Mollie's Delicious apple can get by on half that. A high chilling requirement variety in a low chill year blooms and leafs out late, fails to fruit properly and doesn't perform. In the worst-case scenario, the tree can linger and die. Growers make their varietal choices based on the average chilling hours in their region. For example, blueberry growers can choose between high chill, medium chill, low chill and, now with the latest breeding, no chill. Breeding a low chill

with a high chill results in a bell-shaped curve of chilling requirements across a population of seedlings. It's how we move things forward.

With technology comes progress. The thermograph is now a museum piece. The data logger has taken its place. Now, you can skip buying the data logger. Instead, there are a number of mobile apps you can download that will give you all the chilling information derived from the nearest weather station. All you do is type in your ZIP code and wait a minute or two for the data to display.

School Garden Training Plants Seeds in Educators' Minds

By Jocelyn Moore

This spring, SFA Gardens and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service trained educators on how to start a school or community garden. The dynamic workshop explored outdoor learning, hands-on bed building and lasagna gardening, and participants cooked and tasted various recipes from the garden. Teachers and volunteers also explored and sampled lessons from the Learn, Grow, Eat and Go! curriculum to meet nearly 100 Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards.

The training is usually offered in the summer, but organizers wanted

to give teachers a jump-start as many schools and community groups were interested in starting gardens this spring.

Nacogdoches



has seen a growth in school and community gardens during the past three and half years, starting with a school garden at Thomas J. Rusk Elementary School, which volunteers Jim and Kerry Lemon revitalized. Carpenter Elementary School, Fredonia Elementary School and Head Start quickly followed with school gardens of their own. Currently, there are more than 13 sites at varying stages of the implementation process.

The training taught attendees the necessary skills to get started, which included hands-on participation. Workshop attendees also went home with the LGEG curriculum binder, free seeds from the annual Nacogdoches Seed Swap, and Brooks-Quinn-Jones Elementary School won the raffled bed assembled during the training. Best of all, teachers and volunteers left inspired and well-networked in their growing community of gardeners.

Participant and teacher Mike Silva



from Meadowview Elementary School in Bossier City, Louisiana, praised the training.

“The principal was impressed with my garden presentation, which included all the materials [SFA Gardens] provided during the recent training. She gave me permission to start the garden,” Silva said. “I planted an herb garden today using all the knowledge I obtained during the training. It was great and gave me the motivation to get the garden growing!”

To get involved as a volunteer for a school or community garden, contact Jocelyn Moore at (936) 205-7180 or moorejv@sfasu.edu.



Plant Sale Round-Up

Garden Favorites for Spring

By Dawn Stover



'Orange Storm'TM and 'Scarlet Storm'TM Double Take flowering quince mingle in the landscape.



A bumblebee leisurely nectars on prairie blazing star flowers.



'Standing Ovation' little bluestem grass shows off its many colors.

We're quickly approaching another spring plant sale, and we've been working diligently to grow healthy, hearty plants for you.

I've been watching our Double Take quince varieties for the last few years, and I continue to be impressed. I'm fond of the old fashioned flowering quince with its delicate, nearly pastel flowers. Its blossoms are indicators that spring has sprung and that the azaleas won't be far behind.

Double Take are bolder versions of old fashioned varieties with dark, fully double flowers. There are several colors in the series, but I'm most enamored with 'Scarlet Storm'TM and 'Orange Storm'TM even though scarlet and orange don't rank among my favorite colors. 'Scarlet Storm'TM flowers are a deep, attractive, brick red and have open centers allowing for a pop of color from the yellow stamen. 'Orange Storm'TM holds its coral-orange petals more closely, resembling sweet little rosebuds. Medium green foliage appears on the upright stems after the flowers fade, offering good vertical structure to the landscape in summer. Find them at our plant sale under their genus *Chaenomeles*.

Salvia is perhaps my favorite genus behind *Echinacea*, and as always, we grow a lot of *Salvia*, or sage, for the spring sale. Some are perennial and some are tender, but all are true workhorses in the summer garden. The perennial 'Henry Duelberg' is tough as nails and drought tolerant once established. It holds its tall, blue flower spikes straight on stiff blue stems. They make excellent cut flowers and are probably the busiest flowers in our garden in terms of pollinator activity. 'Amistad' is perhaps my favorite sage with robust, glossy green foliage

and huge spikes of velvety, deep purple, tubular flowers — the size and shape of which are perfect for attracting hummingbirds.

Liatris are among my favorites in the pollinator habitat. *Liatris pycnostachya*, known commonly as prairie blazing star, provides towering columns of densely packed, starry purple flowers that bloom in a progression up sturdy stems. They are native to lean soils where they grow nearly waist high, but given average garden conditions and supplemental moisture, they will reach head height. Given the girth and weight of the inflorescence, plants can benefit from staking, but also can be left to meander in a more natural landscape. They bloom around August and mix well with native bunch grasses and sanguine coneflower.

Speaking of native bunch grasses, there's a selection of little bluestem *Schizachyrium scoparium* that makes my heart skip a beat. 'Standing Ovation' is a selection from North Creek Nurseries that keeps its upright habit without any lodging in richer garden soils. The foliage of this soft-to-the-touch grass presents in shades of powdery blue with hints of purple, yellow and pink. It's pretty spectacular. I enjoy mixing it with natives and non-natives, and it's pretty when planted en masse or as a single specimen.

Finally, there's *Cleome* 'Señorita Rosalita.'[®] This lovely little annual has captured my heart. Its soft pink, spidery flowers bloom all summer. Plants stay relatively compact, especially compared to seed-grown selections, and keep their "knees" covered by keeping foliage along the stems from the ground to the blossoms. The bloom spikes tend to get a little rangy after plants have been

blooming for a good while, but they take shearing like a champ and begin to bloom again in no time. I may shear my plants once or twice each summer. Although they are not winter hardy, they provide wonderful color throughout the hotter parts of our growing season so I don't

mind replacing them each spring.

As much as I love flowers, I love seeing cheerful gardeners and the plant combinations they create at our events. Thank you for your support during the last few decades. Can you believe this will be my 41st plant sale? I can't.

GARDEN GALA DAY PLANT SALE

9 A.M. TO 2 P.M. APRIL 7

PINEYWOODS NATIVE PLANT
CENTER, 2900 RAGUET ST.

Top Five Picks

Is it really almost time for our Garden Gala Day Plant Sale? Somehow, even though we are watering and weeding daily, the plant sale always seems to sneak up on me. We have been busy preparing showstoppers and native classics for the big day. Luckily, I haven't been too busy to pick some of my favorites. ~ Jordan Cunningham



1 *Monarda* is one of my favorite plants. It's classic and brilliant. The *Monarda* 'Peter's Purple' flower itself is like a circle of small tubular flowers. It reminds me of a paintbrush, and it provides a perfect pop

of a rich pink-purple color. It's a hotspot for pollinators like bees and butterflies. *Monarda* is in the Lamiacea, or mint, family, so the leaves have a light fragrance and can be used to make tea. The plant can reach up to 2 1/2 feet tall and bush up to form a clump in cottage garden style. *Monarda* is mildew resistant, prefers full sun and a soil on the drier side. The common name is bee balm, and the bees definitely approve!



3 The pollinator action on *Agastache* 'Blue Fortune' is amazing, and if the pollinators love it, it's got to be good! *Agastache* is known for being a continual bloomer and having a light minty fragrance. It likes full sun, dry soils and is drought tolerant. 'Blue Fortune' spreads anywhere from 1 to 1 1/2 feet. It can reach 3 feet tall and is deer resistant. *Agastache* 'Blue Fortune' has many great qualities — it's a low-maintenance beauty and a must have for pollinator gardens.



4 This year's native-inspired coneflower is *Echinacea* 'Cheyenne Spirit.' Coneflowers are great plants in general. Their ability to attract pollinators, drought tolerance and deer resistance make them perfect for any home garden. 'Cheyenne Spirit' has all that and more. This hybrid is unique because it is a mix of bright colors like yellow, purple, pink and red. Each individual plant has a different color

flower, so combining several plants together in a landscape provides a colorful statement. *Echinacea* 'Cheyenne Spirit' is more vigorous than other colored coneflowers. It is a summer bloomer that prefers a sunny spot.



2 *Cleome* 'Señorita Rosalita,'® or spider flower, is a wonderful, beautiful and bewitching plant. Tall stalks are full of dark green leaves and multiple clusters of lavender-pink flowers. Spider flower seems

an appropriate way to describe the flowers — everything about them is long, thin and reaching. This particular type of *Cleome* is great because it lacks the large thorns and sticky, smelly foliage most other *Cleome* have. 'Señorita Rosalita'® also lacks the clunky seedpods, so it won't seed out all over your garden. This is a sun-loving annual, so plant it in a sunny spot with well-drained soil.



5 People always ask about colorful plants that will thrive in the shade. My recommendation is *Stromanthe sanguinea* 'Triostar,' which is a tropical native to Brazil where it grows wild in forest undergrowth. The tricolor leaves can brighten a shady spot. The pink-purple undersides of the leaves provide color that we can't always get from flowering plants grown in too much shade. This

plant needs indoor protection in cold winters, but it will thrive in hot and humid summers.

Lumberjacks Make Great Interpreters

By Elyce Rodewald



One of the best things about being a part of SFA Gardens is working with SFA students. We hire students to assist with our Nacogdoches Naturally afterschool

program and also to serve as counselors for the summer Pineywoods Day Camp. I also interact with many students who are seeking volunteer or internship opportunities for class credit.

Students in SFA's National Association for Interpretation chapter volunteer their time and talents to educate visitors at SFA Gardens. They play an integral role in the success of many of our outdoor family days. Last fall, they organized and hosted a BioBlitz at the PNPC, and in January, they brought angler education to Nacogdoches KidFish at Lakeside Park. This dedicated group of forestry majors most recently presented numerous activities for the Great Backyard Bird Count. They willingly shared their passion and enthusiasm for wildlife, and they helped our visitors learn about migration, bird identification, bird diets, bird anatomy, eggs and more through active, hands-on displays and games.

NAI students are an impressive group. They determine a visitor's level of understanding and then adjust their discussion and presentation accordingly. I observed students who were patient and kind with our youngest visitors. They played the same games with the same children over and over (and over again!) because the children were interested, engaged and learning. The NAI students were just as enthusiastic the first time they ran the bird identification relay with our visitors as they were the hundredth time. The NAI students have an impressive work ethic. They are organized, punctual, prepared, on task, and they stay until everything is cleaned. They also are a cheerful bunch, even when our start times for events are 6:30 or 7 a.m.

I am happy SFA Gardens and NAI have formed this symbiotic relationship. NAI students have a place to practice lessons they are learning in their forestry classes, and they are gaining real-world experience in interpretation. SFA Gardens benefits from the energy and passion they bring to our family days. NAI students often double the number of presenters we have at an event, allowing us to bring bigger and better programs to our community.

If you missed NAI students at the Great Backyard Bird Count, make plans to meet them at the Earth Day Celebration held in conjunction with our Garden Gala Day Plant Sale April 7. Take the opportunity to congratulate them on their good work. Then, take a moment to appreciate that these young adults are our involved, intelligent, hardworking, passionate hope for the future. Lumberjacks make great interpreters, and the NAI Lumberjacks are just plain great!

Great Backyard Bird Count a Success

By Elyce Rodewald

Cold and rainy weather brought enthusiastic birders and birds to the Great Backyard Bird Count in February. Cliff Shackelford, a non-game ornithologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, led two bird watching walks, tracked species and observed a number of birds. This year, 32 species were recorded. The PNPC is a popular bird watching location year round with two miles of accessible trails.

Species Sighted at Bird Count

American crow	Ruby-crowned kinglet
American goldfinch	Sharp-shinned hawk
American robin	Tufted titmouse
Barred owl	Turkey vulture
Black vulture	White-breasted nuthatch
Blue jay	White-throated sparrow
Carolina chickadee	Yellow-bellied sapsucker
Carolina wren	Yellow-rumped warbler
Cedar waxwing	
Chipping sparrow	
Common grackle	
Cooper's hawk	
Dark-eyed junco	
Downy woodpecker	
Eastern bluebird	
Eastern phoebe	
Eastern towhee	
Hermit thrush	
House finch	
Mourning dove	
Northern cardinal	
Northern mockingbird	
Pine siskin	
Red-bellied woodpecker	



An Anemone was Lost, but Now it's Found

By Dr. David Creech



Anemone X 'Alice Staub'

There's only one Anemone that's been bulletproof in East Texas. Years ago, I was sauntering in the landscape of Alice Staub Liddell, a past president of the Houston Garden Club of America, Houston socialite and philanthropist. She was a close friend of Lynn Lowrey, and we traveled

together in the mountains of Mexico in the 1980s. In her garden, I spotted an Anemone that Lynn had given her for safekeeping, and I was quite impressed. While I had long admired the species, I had poor luck getting them to thrive in East Texas. I asked if I could divide the plant, and she said, "Yes, of course."

At SFA, the plant thrived, and we passed it around under her namesake. I think it's a hybrid, and the official epithet would be *Anemone X 'Alice Staub'*. Taxonomically, *Anemone X hybrida Paxton* is normally considered a hybrid of *Anemone hupehensis var. japonica* and *Anemone vitifolia*, but to be honest, I'm not sure where 'Alice Staub' originally derived nor its early history. I remember Alice remarking it was one of the only Anemones she had found to do well in Houston soils and climate. It forms large mounds of dark green foliage and features 2-inch pinkish blooms on stems up to 3 feet. It does run a bit cheerfully in the garden and appreciates morning sun.

More than a decade ago, I gave a few Anemones to Janet, and they prospered at her home in Shreveport, Louisiana. Years later, I wanted to propagate it, and I couldn't find the plant at SFA Gardens. I assumed it was extinct at SFA. I asked Janet if I could divide her plants and she acquiesced as long as I promised I'd bring her back some plants. I brought a bag of small plants to SFA and remember giving it to Dawn, who denies that. She could be right. Before I knew it, I was anemoneless. Janet began to ask, "Where are my plants?" I said they are in process. Fortunately, Dawn finally recognized my marriage was in trouble. She found the plant in the garden, propagated plenty, and we were back in business. The plant will be featured in the spring 2018 plant sale, and my marriage is back on track.

Jeff Abt, who just retired as the garden writer for The Daily Sentinel in Nacogdoches, really liked this plant and recognized it as a fine perennial in one of his columns. Kudos to Dawn for resurrecting the plant and bringing it back into our Nacogdoches family.

Upcoming Events



MARCH 15 TO APRIL 15: AZALEA TRAIL

Follow the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail through the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, Gayla Mize Garden, Arboretum, PNPC and throughout Nacogdoches. For more information, contact the Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau at visitnacogdoches.org.



APRIL 7: GARDEN GALA DAY PLANT SALE AND EARTH DAY CELEBRATION

Shop for a variety of Texas-tough perennials, annuals, ornamental grasses, natives, trees and shrubs from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the PNPC, located at 2900 Raguet St. Two weeks before the sale, visit sfagardens.sfasu.edu for a list of available plants. The Earth Day Celebration begins at 9 a.m. and will feature educational booths and activities.



APRIL 12: THERESA AND LES REEVES LECTURE SERIES

Listen to Amanda McWhirt from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock explain why she says, "I Have a Thorny Issue to Discuss: Blackberry Basics."



APRIL 21: ART IN THE GARDENS

Explore a variety of art media using nature and the gardens as inspiration from 9 a.m. to noon at the PNPC. The cost is \$10 per family.



APRIL 28: BREAKFAST ON THE FARM

Join SFA agriculture students for breakfast at SFA's Todd Agricultural Research Center. During this free event, you can meet the animals, take a hayride, explore and learn about agriculture through hands-on activities from 9 a.m. to noon. Call (936) 468-3705 for a free ticket.



MAY 10: THERESA AND LES REEVES LECTURE SERIES

Hear James Wilhite of Wilhite Landscaping in Tyler present "Planting by the Moon: Rhyme or Reason."

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The free lecture series events will begin at 7 p.m. in the Brundrett Conservation Education Building. A drawing for plants from SFA Gardens will follow.

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COME GROW
WITH US.

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*“In the garden as elsewhere, good design is simple design,
whether in its general disposition or in detail.”*

– “The Education of a Gardener” by Russell Page

