



# SFA Gardens NEWS

## Notes from the Director

By Dr. David Creech

I can report it hasn't been dull since the last newsletter. I went back to last winter's newsletter and found it sprinkled with cheer and happy predictions everywhere. COVID-19 was about to drift away. The winter would be kind, rains would fall and all would be well in the gardens. Happier days would return to the university. Well, we all know how that worked out. The pandemic continues. Seriously, who could have predicted the record-breaking winter storm Uri last February? This university is still sailing this boat through what many might call a rough and stormy sea. As a passenger, I think I see smoother seas just over the horizon.

Change is part of any garden. Right now, the biggest shock to the garden's nerve center is that Dawn Stover has moved on to a new chapter in her career. Still, by any ruler, Dawn is a perfect fit for this fine position with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. A reflection on Dawn's place here in SFA Garden's history is later in this newsletter.

Kudos go out to Jordan Cunningham, student assistants and volunteers for all the hard work in the greenhouses and nurseries. After a

very successful fall plant sale, we're on track to make the spring sale shine. We promise an interesting inventory of Texas-tough plants for the East Texas gardening world at a good price and for a great cause.

Duke Pittman, Thomas Dimmitt, Devin Spade and our student assistants get a round of applause for keeping the gardens in good shape. This is no easy chore in normal times. Since last February's snow/ice storm, it's been a bigger challenge. We've been wrestling with tree and limb debris in the gardens for what seems like forever. We now have a mountain of mulch at the east side of the Gayla M. Mize Azalea Garden, and we may never have to buy mulch again. The crew has been planting lots of new plants hard and fast to make a garden happy. With 128 acres, seven miles of trails, and scattered plantings and collections, SFA Gardens has always been a bit of a juggling contest. Prioritizing what gets done and what doesn't is the real challenge, and so far, we're still on point.

*Continued on Page 2* »

## In This Issue:

- 2 | A Season for Buckeyes
- 4 | Black-Eyed Susans: Eye Love Them
- 5 | Until we meet again
- 6 | Dawn Stover
- 8 | A Classroom Back in Every Garden and Forest
- 9 | Illicium species – Anise trees for the South
- 10 | Plant profile: Soapwort Gentian
- 11 | Upcoming Events



We're proud of Lais Machado, a graduate research assistant who defended her thesis in November. Her thesis project, "Assessing Freezing Effect on Kiwifruit Cultivars and Mapping Suitable Areas for Growing the Crop in East Texas," was actually designed before the mega freeze last February. She was initially quite upset to have such a hard freeze hit her plots. I looked at it much differently. After all, to have the worst freeze in a century land on your thesis project, a thesis focusing on a wide range of kiwifruit genetics making it through the winter, well, that's hard to beat. Lais had six cooperator locations on this project, each with two data loggers, from Dangerfield in the north all the way down to the northwest side of Houston. Dr. Dave Kulhavy was Lais's advisor, and SFA Gardens provided additional support by a Texas Department of Agriculture specialty crop block grant.

In a really positive step back to normalcy, Dr. Alan Sowards has been coordinating the SFA Gardens' environmental education program. Just being able to say the "kids are back" is a success story in itself. To me, the

most serious impact of the pandemic and budget cuts has been the disruption to a truly stellar program. So, going from approximately 12,000 kids per year to zero was not acceptable. I realized years ago when the dust settles on this garden, it will probably be this program that had the most impact. Alan is a bridge to the future of our youngest citizens returning to SFA Gardens.

As the new year begins, it's rather easy for me to be reflective on the state of our garden nation. It's true there are serious challenges ahead. The idea of returning to some kind of normalcy seems elusive. However, the positives here are enormous. We have interesting plants, smart people, good soils and exciting plans on the table. We have wonderful volunteers. We have a great project at Moody Gardens. The kiwifruit project continues. The boardwalk and bridge repair projects at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center worked out perfect. New plants are everywhere. For all of us, the path ahead seems a bit undefined. All I can say is time will tell. Until we figure it all out, let's keep planting.

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## A Season for Buckeyes

By Jordan Cunningham

*"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under the heavens."*

*Ecclesiastes 3:1*

I have thought of this verse many times since this past winter. Just as there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, there also is a time to experience a hard, cold winter and a time to reap the benefits of a surplus of chilling hours.

Although we suffered the prolonged cold and multiple snow events here in East Texas, the string of chilly days caused our plants to stay in dormancy longer. A longer dormancy period is equal to a longer rest for our hardy trees, shrubs and perennials. Yes, we did lose some plant material, and that was sad, but many of our plants that survived celebrated with a victory lap of beautiful flowers in the spring. Here at SFA Gardens, we saw an explosion of blooms on our American fringe trees, viburnums, dianthus and many others.

With the surplus of flowers came an abundance of what every propagator dreams of: seeds. One of these major seed producers was the red buckeye, *Aesculus pavia*, in the Mast Arboretum at SFA. The flowers were bursting and beautiful last spring. Around September, when the



*Photo by Kealy Hathaway*

leaves began to fall, the blooms faded and gave way to swollen bulges on every branch tip. Later in the season, while planting the colored annuals in the soil below, our student workers found dozens of plum-sized, golden-brown spheres. They stumbled over them on the surrounding pathways, dug them up in the soil, and still there were more up in the tree. They filled their pockets, shirts and hats with their findings and brought the treasures back to the office.

Our buckeyes are known to produce a few dozen seeds in the average year. This is a healthy and sustainable amount for the average specimen. However, between curious students, avid local gardeners, and the hungry wildlife, only a handful of these beauties ever make it back to base. But this year was different. During the winter, while I was trudging around in the snow carrying firewood, this tree was recharging and storing up the energy to produce more blooms, more pollen and the potential for more seeds. The rest of the process was up to the local pollinators. Based on the number of seeds produced, the bees, hummingbirds and butterflies did an excellent job.

Back at the head house, we decided on a good process for planting the buckeye seeds. We filled two-gallon pots halfway with bark then filled the top half with a finer potting soil. About 10 seeds were planted in each pot then covered with an inch of soil. We chose a two-gallon pot because the taller pot will provide more space for the roots to stretch out. Multiple seeds were planted per pot to reduce the materials and space used. We planned to pot the successfully germinated seeds into their own pots after giving them time to grow. The pots were placed outdoors and covered with webbed trays and heavy rocks to deter hungry squirrels. After a good watering, the pots were placed just outside of the nursery sprinklers range so they would only receive the natural rain fall and not daily watering.

Two months later, the mild December temperatures allowed some of the seeds to begin germinating. The sight of them popping up between the tray slats in the fall afternoon light was very picturesque. With the rest of winter still ahead of us, these little buckeyes have a long road ahead of them before they are deemed worthy of their own pot. But hopefully more time and cooler temperatures will encourage more of the seeds to germinate.

For everything there is a season, and every season is important. We joke here in the office that we all have PTSD from last winter. We have over-planned for this winter although, so far, temperatures have only been mild. We worry about the heat of the summer, but hot summers make plant roots grow deeper. We shun the cold of the winter, but if we had not had such a drastic winter, this spring may not have been so beautiful. And while we stressed that this winter was so late on arrival, the most beautiful fall took place. For everything there is a season — make the most of the season you are in.



*Aesculus pavia* little orange seedling



*Aesculus pavia* brown seedling



*Aesculus pavia* large green seedling

# Black-Eyed Susans: Eye Love Them

By Thomas Dimmitt

I know it's winter and Black-Eyed Susans are not in bloom, but they're still easily one of my favorite herbaceous plants and make me look forward to the sunny warm day to come. Black-Eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia hirta*, is a hardy native biennial aster with beautiful yellow rays, helping provide a rich mosaic of color to the landscape and garden. The name Black-Eyed Susan can be traced back to the English poem "Black-Eyed Susan" written by John Gay in the 18th century. Interestingly the poem also discusses a wild nonnative flower in England,

Sweet William, *Dianthus barbatus*. Today, *Rudbeckia hirta* is the official state flower of Maryland.

Black-Eyed Susan is part of the very large and diverse Asteraceae family. The flowers native range is most of the continental U.S. and some parts of Canada. The plants typical growth pattern is biennial, making its life span two years from germination to fruition and death. Blooms develop the second year and can be visible from June to September. As a wildflower, the plant makes good groundcover and reaches heights of about one meter.



*Rudbeckia hirta* 'Indian Summer'

Leaves on black-eyed Susans are simple alternate with an ovate shape and entire shaped margin. The leaves exhibit a shamrock green color; however, foliage color can vary a bit depending on cultivar. Leaves tend to reach four to eight inches before dropping in colder weather. Flower heads tend to be orange, red or yellow and are two to three inches long with 10 to 20 ray flowers around a central disk. Seeds produced are significantly small, about half of a millimeter in diameter, and can benefit some species of songbirds. The most distinguishable feature on black-eyed Susan is the significant pubescence present on foliage. Another noteworthy characteristic is that the leaf base narrowly tapers along the leaf stalk.

The hardiness zone of *Rudbeckia hirta* is officially 3-7; however, it is very adaptable in all 50 states, being winter hardy in areas where low temperatures are between minus 30° and minus 20°. Besides being adaptable throughout the United States, black-eyed Susans are wonderful hardy, native ground covers that can attract wildlife and help in erosion control. In its conservation efforts and erosion control, the U.S. Department of Agriculture will mix half a pound of black-eyed Susan seed per acre with grasses, legumes and other forbs. The sunny yellow flowers can then hopefully perpetuate indefinitely once established. Black-eyed Susans also aren't susceptible to any serious disease or insects; however, they can be susceptible to powdery mildew.

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## ● Until We Meet Again

● By Dawn Stover

Most of you have probably heard by now that I'm exploring a new career adventure. In November 2021, I began working at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service's East Texas Plant Materials Center. It was no easy decision to leave the SFA Gardens after 24 years of service, but I believe God's timing is perfect, and this opportunity came when it was most needed.

I am still here, still living west of Nacogdoches in our little hamlet in the country, still volunteering in the community and serving on several boards, still working with native plants. My morning commute is more southerly than easterly, my new office is surrounded by the Angelina National Forest, and my new role involves more acronyms than I've encountered in my entire life, but I am still here!

You may be wondering, "Just where is here, Dawn? And just what are you doing?" If you've ever been to, or driven by, the SFA Experimental Forest, you may have noticed the blocks of grasses and flowers growing behind a high fence. That's the ETPMC. Our mission includes developing plant-based conservation solutions for the Western Coastal Plain service area, with a focus on improving soil and water quality, as well as wildlife habitat. In my role as study leader, I will be responsible for conducting studies to create or improve planting strategies and technologies that align with NRCS conservation practice standards. My first study will involve evaluating wildflower seeding rates for NRCS Zone 4 and determining if established rates are appropriate in a zone that receives a substantial amount of

rainfall compared to the other four NRCS zones in Texas. The study will be implemented over a three-year period at Caddo Mounds State Historical Site, just west of Alto.

Additionally, we are fortunate to work closely with East Texas Natives, a regional component to the Texas Native Seeds Program of Texas A&M University's Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute. Their focus is on developing locally adapted native seeds for the commercial seed market to enable native plant restoration on a broad scale. I will consult on native forb (flower) suggestions, and collaborate on seed collection, growing and evaluation for potential releases in the future.

I will miss many things from the SFA Gardens. I will miss growing the hundreds of varieties of plants that feed the plant sales and gardens. I will miss the hustle and bustle of campus life and the exuberance new students bring to the workplace. I will not miss the plant sales because I intend to participate as a volunteer, but I also will not miss the choreography of making sure all the details, including writing "The Beast" (aka the plant list) are in place. Most of all, though, I will miss the people — my staff members, who were more like family than coworkers; my volunteers who became friends; my colleagues across campus who were, and are, eager for SFA to put its best face forward.

I look forward to continuing to serve you as an SFA Gardens volunteer and would love for you to join me in that capacity. I hope to continue to teach wreath making each December, and maybe we'll catch up in the audience at a future Les and Theresa Reeves Lecture Series event. Wishing you all the best ... until we meet again!





## Dawn Stover

By David Creech

For the last two years, we've been shuffling from one reality to another. Right now, we are trying to get used to the idea that Dawn Stover has left the building. After 24 years at SFA Gardens as a research associate, Dawn has accepted a wonderful position with the National Resources Conservation Service and will be based at the East Texas Plant Materials Center. I have to admit, when Dawn first told me this move was going to happen, I said "No, I'm so sorry. I won't allow it." Well, that didn't work out and the more-money, less-stress, great-job, exciting-new-challenges lines won out. Still, I have totally mixed feelings on this change. One part of me knows this is a terrific job with opportunity for big impact on mega landscapes in the piney woods. After all, protecting ecosystems and native plant

communities is a noble goal. Dawn is a perfect fit. On the other side of the coin, there's zero doubt the greenhouses, nurseries, landscapes and our community at SFA Gardens will miss her shadow.

It seems just like yesterday when Dawn was a horticulture graduate assistant sitting on a stool in the Forestry Greenhouse, knocking out data on *Camptotheca acuminata*, the Happy Tree of China. She had recently graduated with a bachelor's degree in biology from West Texas A&M University and landed here to pursue a master's degree. She received that in 1999, and it was a hop, skip and a jump to become immersed in this garden adventure. Dawn was here when the gardens comprised just eight acres, during the pre-Mast Arboretum days. She

was here when the gardens expanded into four theme gardens and a Lanana Creek corridor. She's been growing nursery and greenhouse crops and nurturing landscapes for over 24 years. After more than 40 fall and spring plant sales under her charge, she's set a high bar for organization, plant numbers, plant quality and plant happy people. However, I suspect it's her work at SFA Gardens with the rare and precious plants of the piney woods that truly prepares her for the work ahead at the NRCS.

I ran a search on an old external hard drive to see my first saved correspondence to Dawn and came up with a May 1997 document, an old Garden Warriors to-do list. It's particularly poignant. "Dawn, plant the *Spigelia marilandica* in the Arb Shade garden, west side of the deck – colony on 1-foot centers – little sun ok but make sure they're near a sprinkler! We can make this a stock block for future work. Also, dig, divide and then plant the *Spigellia* under the oakleaf hydrangea in the bog, they need more sun." Indian pink remains one of our favorite shade-loving natives. If it's in bloom, it sells.

What makes Dawn perfect for her new charge is a long history working with the rare, threatened and endangered plants of the piney woods and studying the ecosystems they call home. We've long held an interest in so many intriguing natives that find themselves on the edge of extirpation from the piney woods. Dawn was here when the gardens had a focus on *Hibiscus dasycalyx*, *Phlox nivalis ssp. texensis*, *Gaillardia aestivalis var. winkleri*, *Stewartia malacodendron* and others. We called our program the "SFA Arboretum's Three R's: Rescue, Research and Reintroduction." We hosted some great Cullowhee Lone Star Regional Native Plant Conferences. We created and sold some great T-shirts. Pulling off a big multi-day conference is no easy chore. Dawn was the behind-the-scenes stabilizing force bringing calm to moments that were less than orderly.

By most yardsticks, there are about 50 native plants in the piney woods struggling to call this place home. Some have relatives to the east or west and, while not endangered, their numbers are small and their genetic resilience questionable. The rarest plants may exist in only a few spots. Some are rather beautiful; we referred to them as the megacharismatics. They're rare yet charming enough to find a place in any East Texas garden. All were worthy of study, not just for their precarious numbers in the wild, but for what they can add to the health of our natural urban ecology. Her work led to connections with the fine folks in the state and federal agencies charged with protecting the piney woods. She connected with the



resident native plant geeks, civic groups and landowners in East Texas. For many years, her footprints have been all over the special places that make the Texas Forestry Country unique. Her work with *Gaillardia* seedling selections led to a fine introduction, 'Grape Sensation.' For that work, she received the Lynn Lowrey Memorial Award in 2015 from the Native Plant Society of Texas. SFA's color is purple, you know.

Combining horticulture with plant conservation efforts is a natural union. Jim Affolter, director of horticulture at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, wrote in a 1997 *HortScience* journal, "Although there is general agreement that long-term survival of endangered species is best assured by preserving natural habitat, off-site activities involving horticultural technology often provide an essential stepping stone on the path to recovery." Simply stated, Jim underscores the truth that marrying the skills of horticulturists with the needs of rare plant conservation is critical to the health and impact of plant conservation. Dawn brought that to the table here, and she's taking it with her to a brand-new adventure in life. We wish her the very best.



# A Classroom Back in Every Garden and Forest

By Dr. Alan Sowards

We need programs that take science out of the classroom and put it into nature's science laboratory — the great outdoors. What better place to accomplish this than in the SFA Gardens?

In a time when coronavirus has captured the headlines and dictated how we live our lives, it is time to follow the science and recapture our children's curiosity, reduce their stress from having to be in front of computer screens, and immerse their senses once again in the great outdoors.

As more students return to school settings, maintaining proper distancing in existing classrooms will be challenging. Schools were not designed to allow for students to social distance. In the outdoors, by contrast, students can spread out and fresh air is constantly moving, making it safer than poorly ventilated classrooms.

We have an opportunity to breathe new life into our outdoor programs at the SFA Gardens. There appears to be positive indicators on the horizon for a much-anticipated come back. The following are examples of these positive indicators.

## Wild About Science

Thirty-five SFA elementary and middle school science interns participated in three training sessions held at the Brundrett Conservation Education building and the Pineywoods Native Plant Center in October and November.

Ted Stephens, Texas Forestry Association education director and co-coordinator of Texas Project Learn Tree, joined me in leading the Wild About Science workshops. These included three PLT science activities replicated and taught by SFA students at the Mast Arboretum for East

Texas elementary students.

Dr. Tonya Jeffery, SFA assistant professor of elementary science, and Dr. Leah Kahn, SFA associate professor of middle school science, participated with their students in these science field investigations.

Other collaborators were Jacey Tosh, Texas A&M Forest Service conservation education coordinator; John Boyette, SFA forestry adjunct faculty member and past state PLT co-coordinator; Dr. Cheryl Boyette, consultant specializing in curriculum and program evaluation; and Logan Ivy, Texas A&M Forest Service resource specialist.

The first Wild About Science field investigation was Oct. 8 at the Mast Arboretum. Nearly 100 fourth- and fifth-grade students and teachers from Garrison ISD participated in three PLT hands-on, minds-on, inquiry-based science lessons correlated to required state objectives.

The second Wild About Science field investigation was Nov. 17 at the Mast Arboretum. It involved 400 students and teachers from SFA Charter School, Brooks-Quinn-Jones Elementary School, Mount Enterprise ISD, Woden ISD, Fredonia Hill Baptist Academy and Christ Episcopal School.

## Lowe's Heroes Grant

In September, I wrote and was awarded a \$2,100 Heroes Grant from Lowe's to construct four raised gardens on the Christ Episcopal School's campus.

The purpose of these gardens is to incorporate authentic learning experiences in different content areas for multiple grade levels, all emphasizing the importance of healthy food choices.

Eighty-six kindergarten through fifth-grade students from Christ Episcopal School participated in the construction and planting of four raised gardens on their school's campus.

Partners in the Lowe's Heroes Community Grant were Daniel Phelps, Nacogdoches Lowe's assistant store manager, who submitted the grant. Eight Lowe's employees assisted with delivery of materials, construction of storage shed, and provided the tools to help fifth-grade students build the four raised gardens. Lowe's garden center also provided plants to grow in the raised garden. Lowe's employee volunteers included Leasa Lunford, Kecia Mitchell, Stephanie Luna, Marty Booths, Dustin Mobley, Wes Cook, Willis Murray and Jonathon Pratt.

On Nov. 19, students from the school enjoyed the fruits — or, more appropriately, the vegetables — of their labor as they harvested lettuce and herbs from the school's grant-funded

garden for the first time. All 86 students and their teachers enjoyed a fresh salad from their gardens.

### East Texas Adventure Project

I also wrote a letter to partner with SFA's James I. Perkins College of Education for a grant request to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in support of the college's East Texas Adventures Project.

The goal of the project is to target historically underserved female middle school students in Nacogdoches ISD. The project focuses on science, technology, engineering and math, with special attention on environmental science, mentorship and youth empowerment. Jeffery and Straub from SFA's Department of Education Studies submitted the TPWD co-op grant in September.

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## ● Illicium species – Anise trees for the South

By Dr. David Creech

We've had a love affair with anise trees of U.S. and Asian origin for many years. *Illicium floridanum* 'Florida anise' and *Illicium parviflorum* 'small anise tree' are in the family Illiciaceae, both southern natives that run from Florida into Louisiana. We've touted these tough native evergreens for years and think they deserve greater use for a lot of different reasons. The latest reason is that they came through the record mid-February 2021 winter storm Uri totally unscathed. Even our slower-growing variegated clones were seemingly unaware of the danger in that event, which sank temperatures to minus 4 degrees. Whether in a container or in the landscape, there was no damage across the collection of natives.

After many years, we've concluded that anise trees are a perfect understory shrub or small tree for the piney woods. Anise trees and shrubs are deer resistant, and the foliage is usually clean and blemish free. The leaves are packed with chemicals that are toxic to insects and animals. The rule here is don't graze in the landscape. The leaves are quite aromatic when crushed, and the flowers are quite showy. They're not fragrant or may be slightly malodorous. Sometimes the fragrance of fish comes to mind. *Illicium* is not a full-sun candidate in East Texas but can tolerate a good amount of morning sun. It's the blazing heat of an afternoon sun that can turn things south. Key to their performance is well-drained soil with plenty of humus, leaning a bit to the moist side. Given a little shade and some moisture, the bush or small tree can be quite stellar and live many years. We have a fine collection of new and old varieties in the gardens at SFA. A strong performer has been *Illicium floridanum* 'Woodlander's variegated,' which sports a very subtle variegated leaf and a



heavy bloom. *Illicium floridanum* 'Miss Scarlett' is new in the garden, quite a showoff and somewhat upright. 'Shady Lady' has wavy gray-green leaves with gray-white variegation, and there are other similar varieties in our mix of oddly variegated clones. We have a couple of white flowered forms, 'Alba' and 'Semmes.' Newer introductions like 'Florida Sunshine' and 'Bananappeal,' both *Illicium parviflorum*s, sport yellow/golden foliage. *Illicium mexicanum* does well here, provided they are planted with excellent drainage in mind, moisture and plenty of mulch. 'Woodland Ruby' is a graceful plant with great blooms, a cross of the Florida and Mexico form. 'Pebblebrook' and 'Head-Lee Compact' are somewhat dwarf,

Continued on Page 10 »

and ‘Swamp Hobbit’ wins the trophy for tiniest variety, rarely getting over a foot tall and taking years to make a three- or four-foot-wide mound.

We’ve planted many Asian species over the years, including *I. henryi*, *I. lanceolatum*, *I. anisatum*, *I. oligandrum* and *I. simsonii*. The holy grail of the anises is *I. simsonii*, a rare plant hailing from the mountains of southern Sichuan, northern Yunnan and into Burma. It sports yellow flowers and is quite common at elevations from Huili to Xichang, Sichuan at elevations from 7 to 10,000 feet. We acquired our plant from Bill McNamara of Quarry Hills Botanical Garden in California, and it did well here for years, even flowered then cratered, with a death reminiscent of Phytophthora. Three or four varieties of *I. anisatum* exist, and a relatively new species, *I. henryi*, the Chinese

anise tree, was introduced by Bob McCartney from a source in England in 1971. The latter seems to be an outstanding species for the South, a durable evergreen large shrub, dense in foliage with showy pinkish red flowers. *I. henryi* performs well and is still with us after many years, a shrub we promoted back in the 1980s and 1990s. Another surprise has been *I. lanceolatum*, which is now a nice 20-year-old, 15-foot-tall tree. *I. mexicanum* has received fanfare in the trade, but the SFA Gardens has had poor results, except with one plant that has found a part-shade location to its liking. ‘Aztec Fire’ is similar to the species. At one point, we even tried *I. verum*, which is semi-tropical. Before switching to a bacterial source, Roche Pharmaceuticals used up to 90% of the world’s Star Anise crop to produce shikimic acid, a chemical intermediate used in the synthesis of Tamiflu.

## Plant profile: Soapwort Gentian

Contributed by Dawn Stover,  
East Texas Plant Materials Center

In our efforts to reinvigorate our Pineywoods Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas, Peter Loos and I have been making an effort to schedule more field trips. We’ve decided that we simply aren’t cut out to be a monthly meeting chapter, but we are definitely quite good at wandering in the woods. And what better way to get to know your native plants than where they naturally occur?

You might think that winter wouldn’t provide much opportunity for hunting plant treasures, but winter is the only time to find soapwort gentians, *Gentiana Saponaria*, blooming in East Texas. This delicate perennial is found in mesic forests or bogs, often occurring on sandy stream banks. They are not easy to spot initially but are easily found after the first specimen is located. Pale to violet blue tubular flowers look as if their lobes are fused, and flowers never fully open. Flowers often occur in clusters and reportedly have no fragrance. I haven’t personally noticed a fragrance in individual blossoms, but there is a distinctly light, sweet odor in the air in the sites we visit. Pollinators include bumblebees primarily and several beetle species. Flowers begin blooming around November in East Texas and can bloom well into December and even into the first part of January.

Soapwort gentians aren’t listed as endangered or threatened and are listed as globally secure in the NatureServe Network, although they are listed as extirpated in two states, critically imperiled in four states, and vulnerable in seven states, with no



status ranking in a handful of other states, including Texas. The last NatureServe species status review occurred in 1984 and is in need of an update. They are uncommon in East Texas and are easily overcome by overgrowth of surrounding vegetation due to lack of fire in their habitat. Easily grown from seed, soapwort gentian would make good candidates for conservation efforts.

While I can’t guarantee you’ll see really unusual plants like these gentians on each trip we take for our Pineywoods Chapter NPSOT, we do encounter some remarkably beautiful and unusual specimens. I included many of these treasures in the collections at SFA’s Pineywoods Native Plant Center and will continue to share specimens with the gardens in order to spotlight the amazing flora from our own backyard. Peter and I would love to see you join the Native Plant Society of Texas and for you to wander in the woods with us one day soon. Become a member at [npsot.org](http://npsot.org), and follow our chapter antics and activities on Facebook @[pineywoodsnpsot](https://www.facebook.com/pineywoodsnpsot). Spring ephemerals are right around the corner, and we’ll soon be looking for trout lilies and toothworts, to name a few. Come wander with us, why don’t you?

# Upcoming Events

**MARCH 10** "The Oklahoma State University Campus" with Steve Dobbs 

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**MARCH 29-30** "Bugs, Bees, Butterflies and Blossoms" with Alan Sowards

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**APRIL 8** "Bugs, Bees, Butterflies and Blossoms" with Alan Sowards

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**APRIL 9-10** Garden Gala Day Plant Sale

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**APRIL 14** "Do We Need to be Scared of Crape Myrtle Bark Scale?"  
with Dr. Mengmeng Gu 

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**MAY 12** "Favorite Perennials for Tough Conditions"  
with Jennifer Buckner 

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**JUNE 9** "Super Flowers, Super Shrubs and Super Trees for a Super Landscape"  
with Allen Owings 

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**JUNE 11** Saturday Seminar: Landscape Design with Ben Miller

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**JULY 1** "Wild About Woodies" horticultural field day

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**JULY 14** TBD with Steven Chamblee 

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**AUG. 11** TBD with Dr. Yan Chen 

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**AUG. 13** Saturday Seminars: Floral Design with Jordan Cunningham

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**SEPT. 8** "Phase II of The Gardens at TAMU: Manifest Destiny in Action!"  
with Dr. Mike Arnold 

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**OCT. 1-2** Fabulous Fall Festival and Plant Sale

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 Indicates the event is part of the Les and Theresa Reeves Lecture Series, which takes place at 7 p.m.  
the second Thursday of each month in the Brundrett Conservation Education Building.

For more information, call (936) 468-4129, or email [sfagardens@sfasu.edu](mailto:sfagardens@sfasu.edu).



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*“Study nature, love nature, stay close  
to nature. It will never fail you.”*

*Frank Lloyd Wright*

