



# SFA Gardens *News*

Volume 11, Issue 1

Spring 2016

## Notes from the Director

By David Creech

It's an East Texas piney-woods monsoon with one squall line after another running our way. Our friends two hours south took the big hit. Our good friend Darren Duling, from Mercer Arboretum in Houston, reports they were under three to seven feet of water in April with more rain in the forecast. It's devastating, and we've been there before. So far, we've dodged the bullet at SFA Gardens as Miss LaNana Creek has stayed in her banks. However, we haven't forgotten the two big floods in June and October 2015. We used to encounter floods like those every three to five years, but that's in the past. For now, the gardens couldn't be happier. Even with irrigation on hand, there's something about good rains that cheers the gardener and plants. We have much to be thankful for. As a garden of people plants and plans, we earn an A+ for making great things happen.

Elyce Rodewald, Kerry Lemon and volunteers led thousands of kids from one learning station to another at the weeklong Birds, Bugs and Blossoms event. As a casual observer for years, I'm convinced a focus on

environmental and horticultural education for kids in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade may be the best thing we do. We're here to cure nature deficit disorder and get kids excited about the world of horticulture.

In the past few months, the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden has been in full bloom and the crowds have been amazing. The Japanese maple, camellia and azalea show this spring was perhaps the best ever. Barbara Stump, Sherrie Randal, Don Parsons and other volunteers met one group after another for tours. While Barbara Stump is now retired, her footprints are still here, and I can report she doesn't respond well when I give her an assignment. I miss Barbara.

As the official photographer, I can report the Little Princess Tea Party in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden remains inspiring. I leave amazed and convinced that parents and grandparents go gaga for little girls dressed up in the latest fairy princess fashion.

As icing on the cake this spring, Dawn Stover and Greg Grant orchestrated the Garden Gala Day Spring Plant Sale in early April,

which had record-breaking attendance. The event was an all-smiles day of perfect weather, busy volunteers, happy customers and a long inventory of ornamental jewels, many only available to the public here. Profits from the plant sale fund SFA Gardens' salaries. We call that incentive.

In the garden, Duke Pittman, Chris Dempsey and student assistants have installed new irrigation lines in various gardens, killed weeds, improved drainage, removed dead trees and wrestled the garden into fine shape for the summer. At the Pineywoods Native Plant Center, we've added new trees, expanded the blueberry planting and created a new drip-irrigated muscadine vineyard at Jimmy Hinds Park. The Skutch maple grove, which was planted in 2011 at the Science Research Center, remains one of the most peaceful places on Earth. Dawn Stover is taking the lead on the new trialing garden at the north end of the Mast Arboretum—a spot to watch grow in size, scale and landscape appeal.

We've expanded the kiwifruit planting by grounds on Starr Avenue, and we're

## Notes, *cont.*

waiting for word on an SFA and Texas A&M University proposal to the Texas Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crops Block Grants program. If that's funded, we'll know in five years if this crop has commercial or homeowner potential, or if it isn't worth the effort.

A project at Moody Gardens on Galveston Island is in the ground and irrigated. We have three students working on their master's thesis in correlation with this long-term project evaluating climate-change friendly plants for a 21<sup>st</sup> century Galveston Island.

Whether we are growing food or beautiful plants, we're here to evaluate the range of plant diversity that can grow here. It's our mantra. Let's not forget Thomas Jefferson

wrote, "the greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add a useful plant to its culture."

The big item on SFA Gardens' plate is funding a new greenhouse at the PNPC. We need to move SFA Gardens' plant production from the horticulture facility behind the agriculture building. The good news is crop science is now a core curriculum course at SFA, which will introduce hundreds of students to the horticulture program in a few years. With Drs. Jared Barnes and Michael Maurer leading the charge, there's a big chance to educate, entertain and enlighten a large number of students about the profession and, of course, entice a members of the class into a life in horticulture.

However, with 25 student labs, traffic and square footage, use of the horticulture facility will explode. Dawn produces a big part of the spring and fall plant sale income here, and the plant sale funds SFA Gardens staff members' salaries. That's a big deal. There's only one conclusion—SFA Gardens container plant production needs to move. After many meetings and discussions, we have a plan and have cleared a location. Our goal is to build a 7,200-square-foot heated greenhouse. A one-page flier in this newsletter outlines the project and describes our campaign to make it happen. Feel free to share. Until next time, let's keep planting.

## SFA 2016 Earth Day Celebration – Purple Campus; Green Community

By Kerry Lemon

On April 2, the annual SFA Earth Day Celebration occurred alongside our beloved Garden Gala Day Spring Plant Sale. Nacogdoches Naturally collaborated with SFA Outdoor Pursuits and Dr. Dawnella Rust and Cyndra Krogen-Morton's health science classes to bring students and the Nacogdoches community together to highlight stewardship and sustainability. Blending the community with the university is an important Earth Day tradition that has been established during the past nine years. It was a beautiful day for the outdoor festival.

A highlight of the event was Dr. Jared Barnes, who spoke about his efforts with the sprout program and the campus farmers market. In addition, guest speaker Mark Stine, representing Bike Texas out of Austin, shared ways to create a bike-

friendly community in Nacogdoches. Stine led a bike awareness ride from the Nacogdoches Farmers Market to the Earth Day Celebration, which SFA psychology intern Dalton McInnis organized.



More than 200 participants also enjoyed music by SFA's Steel Drum Band and acoustical Costa Rican music from Spanish professors Drs. Juan Carlos Ureña and Jeana Paul-Ureña. The Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful Sustainability Award for 2016 was presented to Resilient

Nacogdoches for their efforts in the community.

It was rewarding to see passionate and enthusiastic SFA students presenting activities and information on sustainability concepts to other students and community members. There were many fun opportunities for families and children, such as face painting, making recycled paper, creating bird feeders, listening to Freddie the Fish—an interactive story about water pollution concerns—tossing eco bean bags, bowling and more. An SFA health science team prepared and served healthy food, which was a delicious treat for Earth Day participants.

The day was a great way for the SFA campus to share in the vision of protecting and caring for the Earth and to promote a green community in Nacogdoches.



To make a donation,  
indicate “Greenhouse Project” when you  
call (936) 468-5406,  
visit [www.sfasu.edu/give](http://www.sfasu.edu/give),  
or mail checks to  
P.O. Box 6092, SFA Station,  
Nacogdoches, Texas 75962-6092.

# Growing Forward

A great opportunity is germinating at SFA. The addition of crop science as a core curriculum course for all SFA majors will introduce hundreds of students each semester to the horticulture program. This exciting opportunity will showcase our profession to many more students and gain new majors.

In order to support student success and enhance the horticulture program, plans are underway to construct a 7,200-square-foot, three-bay, gutter-connected greenhouse at the PNPC.

The new facility will provide SFA Gardens with a much-needed area for plant production and student-driven research projects, as well as assist horticulture and forestry students in obtaining real-world experience in an industry-standard greenhouse.

The greenhouse also will provide SFA Gardens with room to develop and evaluate new ornamental plants, implement relevant research programs and enhance all SFA students’ experiential learning. In order to construct this facility, we need your help.

Will you please consider making a donation today to help fund this project?

Donations of any amount are greatly appreciated and will be used toward site prep, the greenhouse kit and construction of the facility. Your contributions directly support students and SFA’s horticulture program. Thank you for helping us continue to Make Great Lumberjacks!

*Dr. David Creech, SFA Gardens director*



## Home on the Range

By Greg Grant

If you happen to cross the wooden boardwalk across from what I refer to as the “marsh meadow” at SFA’s PNPC, please take a moment to admire the diversity of plants and wildlife. This section of the PNPC is known as the Cassandra Stewart Loos Prairie and is a reconstructed wetland and prairie designed to collect runoff water from our PNPC nursery facility, as well as show the various native plants growing in both ecosystems.

Cassandra Stewart Loos passed away on Aug. 25, 2010. Cass was the wife of Peter Loos, our good friend and a longtime supporter of the PNPC and other native plant groups.

The moist portion of this area may or may not have water in it depending on the time of year. The area is both a swamp, which is a wet area dominated by woody plants, and a marsh, a wet area dominated by herbaceous plants. Here you will find young baldcypress

trees, *Brazoria* palms and a few longleaf pine trees. Among the herbaceous plants, you will likely see Louisiana iris, copper iris, cattails, pickerel weed, white spider lilies and the endangered Neches River rose-mallow. You also will see an assortment of tadpoles, water snakes, dragonflies and plenty of raccoon tracks.

The larger, drier portion of this area is our “prairie.” It’s slowly evolving into a real prairie with increasing numbers of native grasses like switchgrass, little bluestem and

Eastern gamagrass. The wildflower numbers are increasing, as well. In early spring, look for tall showy baptisias, also known as false indigo or bush pea, along with evening primrose, dewberries and spring obedient plant. By mid-summer, the giant coneflower and rough coneflower rise up and dominate the show before giving way to spikes of liatris and goldenrod later in the year. Naturally, there also are plenty of native bees, butterflies and birds to take note of.

To keep this area in a herbaceous



marsh and prairie state, the Texas A&M Forest Service visits each winter and conducts a controlled burn to prevent the area from gradually turning back into a typical East Texas forest. The winter fire kills the woody plants (at least to the ground) while encouraging the warm season grasses and perennials. Fires are essential for prairies and pine savannas. Without fire, we wouldn’t have longleaf pines, pitcher plants and red-cockaded woodpeckers. They also promote other wildlife like pine warblers, turkey,

brown-headed nuthatches and quail.

Uncontrolled wildfires are most definitely a bad thing, but it’s very unfortunate to hear the media regularly talking about fire destroying pastures and ranchland when it actually does the opposite. Fire is and always has been a natural part of the landscape. Grasses, perennials and sun-loving wildflowers not only survive a fire, but also sprout back with renewed vigor soon after.

Most of the entire Southeastern U.S. evolved in a fire ecosystem, so most pines, grasses and perennials thrive with regular burns. Certainly most people live in places where they can’t burn their property, but even in the country, I get questions about why I’m “killing” my plants. I’m actually, in a sense, applying a cheap, natural herbicide, fungicide, insecticide and fertilizer by burning.

In addition, prescribed fires also burn up excess fuel on the ground, preventing cat-

astrophic wildfires like Bastrop and other areas experienced in 2011.

Although most homeowners don’t have enough space to recreate prairies in their gardens, they can make mini-prairies or what are known as “pocket prairies.” I have one myself.

My pocket prairie is at my paternal great-grandparent’s old homeplace and is bracketed with old iron bedsteads. My dad calls it my “weed patch” and regularly offers to mow it for me. One man’s trash certainly

See *Home on the Range*, pg. 5

## Home on the Range, *cont.*

is another man's treasure as I dearly love to watch the prairie change through the seasons. I begin each winter with a controlled burn on the section with the most grasses in it and then mow the rest. And that's it. No watering, no spraying and no primping. As more grasses fill back in, the whole thing should burn each winter and I won't have to do my once-a-year mowing.

Without mowing or burning, most East Texas "prairies" and pastures would turn back into forests. I love forests too, but sun-loving wildflowers and native grasses need their own space. I burn in the winter because it's safer, but it eliminates spring-blooming winter annuals like bluebonnets from my mix. I particularly cater to warm season perennials that are dormant during the winter.

In addition to controlling woody vegetation and allowing bare dirt

for seed germination, the burn also acts as an herbicide, eliminating invasive cool season European weeds like ryegrass, vetch, crimson clover and Queen Anne's lace. It also helps control woody invasive species like Chinese tallow, Chinese privet and mimosa. Plus, it makes everything look neat and tidy each spring.

Home pocket prairies can be seeded with native grasses and wildflowers but establish quicker and are generally more successful when planted with containerized plants or plugs. Our spring and fall SFA Gardens plants sales are a great source of native grasses and perennials for pocket prairies.

One doesn't have to have rural property or a large landscape to enjoy a pocket prairie or its associ-



ated native pollinators. Any patch of flower bed or border will do, no matter how small. I've created what I call postage stamp prairies in the past as well as a five-acre tall grass prairie next to my newly planted 20 acres of longleaf pine. See if you can't find space for a little prairie at your place. The birds, bees and butterflies will appear out of thin air to thank you.

## Spring Cheer

By Dawn Stover

Although we had a pretty mild winter, it is nice to finally be in the midst of spring. I think this is the happiest time of the year in the garden because so many flowers are blooming, and the weather is sublime—when it's not raining, of course! It's easy to walk around with a smile on your face as you greet new blossoms each day.

The cheeriest blossoms have been coming from a hybrid tickseed called 'Jethro Tull,' reportedly named for the famous British agriculturist, not the rock band. 'Jethro Tull' is a hybrid of Eastern U.S. natives *Coreopsis lanceolata* 'Early Sunrise' and *Coreopsis auriculata* 'Zamfir' and has a compact habit and golden



*Coreopsis* 'Jethro Tull'

-yellow, fluted, tubular petals. It's been blooming solid for the past month and will continue to bloom with periodic deadheading.

One of the most spectacular spring sensations is the giant plume hidden ginger, *Curcuma elata*. Before pleated, canna-like foliage emerges, pink bracted, pine-cone-shaped flower spikes appear. Small yellow flowers peak out of the lower, less showy, green bracts. Despite the exotic nature of hidden ginger, they are amazingly easy to grow. Plant them in sun and rich, well-drained soil. The rhizomes can easily rot during the winter if they stay too wet. Drainage is key to survivability,



## Spring Cheer, *cont.*



*Curcuma elata*

and with that provision, plants will easily overwinter into the U.S. Department of Agriculture hardiness zone 7.

We're trialing a pink bottlebrush, which is beyond fabulous. *Callistemon viminalis* is native to Australia and has recently been reclassified as



*Callistemon viminalis* 'Hot Pink'

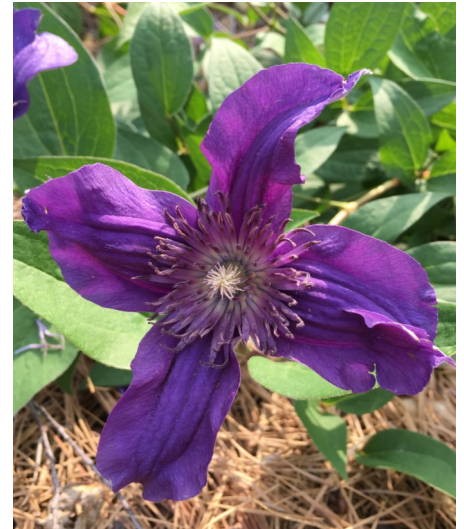
*Meleluca viminalis*. The plant in our trials is called 'Hot Pink,' and while that isn't the most clever cultivar name, it's certainly fitting. Hot pink flowers, resembling a bottlebrush, are produced in abundance and are extremely attractive to nectarivores—a fancy term for animals who mainly persist on nectar.

The best surprises come from unexpected things. I was thrilled to find not only did our new variety of



*Passiflora* 'Aphrodite's Purple Nightie'

passion vine survive the winter, but it also is thriving. *Passiflora* 'Aphrodite's Purple Nightie,' delivers hundreds of buds waiting to open and offer their unique beauty. Purple flowers are layered with sepals, petals and coronal filaments surrounding this surreal-looking reproductive structure known as the androgynophore, which is surrounded at the base with the nectaries that draw in the pollinators. It sounds very complicated, and it looks that



*Clematis* 'Sapphire Indigo'

way, as well. Passion vine also is the host plant for gulf fritillary caterpillars, and I can't wait to see those little orange caterpillars.

One of the trial plants I'm keeping my eye on is a clematis variety meant to be grown as a groundcover. *Clematis* 'Sapphire Indigo' should create a three-foot-wide, 18-inch-tall mound with attractive foliage and dark, indigo-violet flowers throughout the summer. Most gardeners throw their hands in the air when trying to figure out which pruning group their vines belong in, but with sapphire indigo, there is no pruning! While it's still fairly new in our trial program, I suspect it's going to be one of our favorites.

I can't wait to discover more treasures as spring turns to summer. The hydrangeas are coming into their own as the gardenia and Southern magnolia begin to perfume the air. This is prime garden season in the South, and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else!



## The Truth About Flower Fairies

By Elyce Rodewald

More than 100 people gathered in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden to participate in the Little Princess Tea Party in April. Boyette Consulting and SFA Gardens hosted the party with generous assistance from Alpha Psi Omega, Nacogdoches Junior Forum, Cheryl Boyette, Kay Jeffrey, Camille Bolinger, Carol Dowd and Becky Garrett. It was a magical event where moms, daughters, aunts and grandmothers sipped punch, visited with butterflies, were serenaded by Pixie Hollow fairies, created fairy dust and visited a fairy cottage to learn the truth about flower fairies.

Did you know flower fairies are kind, sweet and helpful? They also can be a bit mischievous sometimes. Have you ever had a leaf or a nut fall on your head? Accident? No, probably a mischievous flower fairy! While every fairy has a unique personality, they do share some common traits. For example, they love music and dancing and will find any excuse for a party.

The little princesses learned flowers, trees and other plants are very important to fairies because one cannot exist without the other. A fairy can only be born when a new seed sprouts. Fairy babies sleep hidden under their plant's leaves and grow as the plant grows. The fairy lives with his or her special flower or tree forever. They wear outfits made from its leaves and flowers, so it is easy to hide.

It is the fairy's job to care for the plant. She keeps her plant strong and healthy by making sure it has plenty of sunshine and water and by cleaning and polishing its leaves, flowers and stems. You will often find a fairy singing a special song to



SFA Gardens' head flower fairy, Elyce Rodewald, tends to the flowers.

her plant while working.

Flower fairies rarely reveal themselves to humans, and friendship is very important to them. To be a flower fairy's true friend, you must:

- Be kind, loving and helpful;
- Take care of the animals and plants around you;
- Care for the soil and water;
- Have lots of fun and love to laugh;
- And believe in flower fairies.

The princesses learned about fairy fashions (they love hats), fairy food (they love fresh berries) and fairy spells. This spell encourages the sun to come out on a rainy day: Glimmer, glimmer magic sun, shine your light on everyone!

Most importantly, the princesses discovered all life on Earth is connected. Take from nature only what you need, and give back to Earth whenever you can.

By the end of the party, several little princesses had spotted flower fairies flitting through the garden. So, if you happen to meet someone who does not believe in fairies, you can set them straight. Tell them the truth about flower fairies. Fairies do exist. We have witnesses.



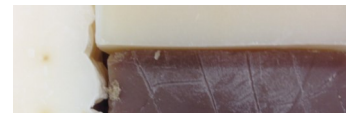
Above: Our lovely princesses enjoying the tea party. Photos courtesy of Kay Jeffrey



Come grow with us!

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**Aug. 6: Seed Saving 101** – Participants will learn the principles of seed collecting, saving, storing, treating and planting seeds for home gardens with Greg Grant, SFA Gardens research associate, from 9 a.m. to noon. The event costs \$25 for SFA Gardens members and \$30 for non-members.



**Sept. 10: Gifts from the Garden—Creating Herbal Soaps** – Participants will learn the cold press method for making soap with natural oils and ingredients from the herb garden with Elyce Rodewald, educational programs coordinator for SFA Gardens, from 9 a.m. to noon. The event costs \$25 for SFA Gardens members and \$30 for non-members.

**Oct. 6: Special Garden Lecture** – Participants can enjoy a special garden lecture with Brent Heath of Brent and Becky's Bulbs at 7 p.m. The event costs \$10, and space is limited, and reservations are required.



All events will be held in the Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Building, 2900 Raguet St.  
For reservations, contact  
[sfagardens@sfasu.edu](mailto:sfagardens@sfasu.edu) or (936) 468-4129.

