STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY
Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture

# SFA Gardens *News*

Volume 11, Issue 2 Summer 2016

## Notes from the Director

By David Creech

Mark Twain said, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness." That's especially true for travelers in a foreign land. After 33 hours of traveling, Janet and I have settled in to the charm of Ninghai — a village near Ningbo, China. Jet lag is getting the best of me as I've been waking bright-eyed in the middle of the night. Janet, who I swear could be a professional sleeper, is in no mood for conversation. Instant coffee is my only partner on the 12th floor of the New Century Hotel. With a newsletter deadline approaching, I'm off writing about my recent discoveries and latest news.

The U.S. news portrays China as a country in the throes of recession with a slowing economy and international trade on the wane. It sure seems a bit different here. I can count a dozen cranes outside our window. Along the three-hour drive from Shanghai, the countryside is a busy landscape of farms, factories, high-rise apartments, people, plants and millions of trees.

I've often wondered, both in the U.S. and here in China, what makes a plant popular or a commodity?

Chinese dogwood

More importantly, why is it difficult to introduce a "new" plant to the industry? One of my colleagues in China explained, "People like what they know." In China, government buyers for major landscape projects decide what plants are popular while nurserymen and ultimately the public decide in the U.S. To introduce a new plant, it's best that it's known. A new crapemyrtle, hydrangea, holly or a redbud has a better chance of making it than an unknown genus, no matter how good that new plant is. Introducing *Huodendron tibeticum*, an evergreen *Styrax* from China, is trickier than introducing a burgundy leaf crape. There's a "which-comes-first" question — the chicken or the egg? Introducing a new plant takes an industry willing to evaluate and promote strong performing new landscape plants. Some might say it's all about marketing.

Finding plants for screening material is another interesting challenge. In Nacogdoches, I'm often asked which plants are best for screening or privacy. Some consider red tip photinia, but I have other ideas. In China, screening materials dominate. The popular evergreens line road edges and medians. Screens separate the spaces between businesses, apartments and parks. Big trees include poplars, sycamores, dawn redwood and our very own bald cypress. Tough, durable, smaller evergreen trees and shrubs, including *Photinia serrulata*, various *Cinnamomums, Viburnums* and one of my favorites, sweet olives, are part of the mix.

At SFA Gardens, we've enjoyed the charm of *Cornus angustata*, the Chinese evergreen dogwood, for decades. We have a line of 'Empress of China' seedlings along the front edge of the Gayla Mize Garden, and

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## Notes, *cont.*

every year they become more impressive. It's drought hardy with glossy evergreen foliage and features a cloak of bright white blooms that charm for nearly a month beginning in May. Add in edible fruit and you have something special. *Photinia serrulata* is evergreen, bulletproof, has a showy bloom period and free from the disease that ravages the more commonly encountered red tip photinia. Finally, most horticulturists find sweet olive, *Osmanthus fragrans*, the go-to plant for screening. It's one of the 10 traditional flowers in China known for fragrance and charm. While some find it a bit slow growing, it fills in a space nicely. With the advent of new "colorful leaf" forms finding their way to U.S. markets and SFA, there's good reason to see this species increasing market share.

While it's certainly a challenge changing what people grow, it's why SFA Gardens exists. We're here for the plants, to push the envelope, to find, evaluate and promote the best. Until next time, let's keep planting.

## Creating Connections

By Elyce Rodewald

This year celebrates 15 years of creating connections at Pineywoods Camp. We are connecting children to the natural world, scientific community, other cultures and each other. Our mission is to create an environment where campers can expand their knowledge, explore the natural world, develop curiosity and nurture a sense of wonder. We encourage them to create community connections, discover inter-relationships and observe stewardship. We hope they will question the status quo and imagine new possibilities.

Since 2002, more than 1,000 children have attended Pineywoods Camp, and Kerry Lemon, camp director, has been the driving force behind the camp's popularity. She has adeptly managed registrations, release forms, staff member training and scheduling, safety protocol and snacks all while forging an effective plan for learning, exploration and fun at camp. The attention to detail, hard work, insight and love Kerry puts into planning is certainly evident when you speak with campers about their experiences.

Whether exploring the creek, conquering the river or simply "on the way to Wonder Woods," campers often exclaim, "This is the best time I ever had!" This year, 75 percent of our campers attended in previous years, and three of our counselors are former campers. A 5-year-old Wonder Woods camper informed us she would be attending camp for the next 10 years and has plans to become a counselor.

Often the most profound moments are brief and unexpected. We see a camper who didn't want to get wet at the beginning of the week splashing in the river and looking for clams with her friends by the end of the week. We watch tired teenagers suddenly become animated and work together as a

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## Connections, *cont.*

team for an outdoor Olympics relay. We smile as a child from one culture shares her language and friendship with children from another culture. We see children working toward a common goal in spite of heat, humidity and mosquitos. We see children playing outside and developing a connection to the natural world. We most definitely see hope for the future in caring and knowledgeable young people. We hope they can hold on to their enthusiasm, innocence, sense of wonder and ability to care about their world.

I was hiking along Jack Creek at the SFA Experimental Forest with my campers, focused on the ground and keeping an eye out for snakes and poison ivy, when a boy paused and shouted, "I can see heaven! Look everybody! I can see heaven! Stand right here, and you can get the best view!" Of course, we all stopped to investigate the view of sunbeams streaming through the towering pines. Everyone agreed it was heaven, and the children began to wave to departed relatives. "Hey, Nana! Hi, Grandpa!" As we moved on, the campers were sure God was watching over their adventures at camp. After 15 exciting years at camp, I have no doubt that they are correct.

## Special Thanks to Pineywoods Camp Supporters and Volunteers

Cory Adams
Kerry Barnes
Cheryl Boyette
John Boyette
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Ray Cole and the Nacogdoches Fire Department
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Merry Anne Shelton
Rick Schaefer
Neal Stilley
T.L.L. Temple Foundation
Bobby Thompson
Howard Williams
Tanner Young

# Holy Anole

**By Greg Grant**

Surely if you are an outdoors person in the eastern half of Texas you have noticed delicate, six-inch green lizards patrolling your garden. These guys have been friends of mine since I was a child. I once caught as many as I could pack into my pockets in Marie Daly's Longview garden until she noticed I was hauling them off and made me set them free. I mowed Marie's yard as a boy and later named the Earth-Kind polyantha rose after her. As all good gardeners do, Marie knew that, like spiders and toads, the lizards were insect eaters and beneficial to her garden. They also are pretty and entertaining to watch. I spent many hours on my Emanis grandparents' front porch in rural Shelby County watching these amazing creatures court, battle and forage for prey.

Due to their ability to change their color from bright green to brown or gray, many people call them chameleons, but they aren't. These little iguana relatives are actually green anoles or Carolina anoles as their Latin name *Anolis carolinensis* indicates. Growing up I never heard them called anoles — we just knew them as lizards. But, in the environmental science world, I primarily hear them referred to as an anole with two different pronunciations. Most pronounce it where it rhymes with "a mole," but I prefer what I think is its original Caribbean Creole pronunciation where it sounds like "cannoli." Just say "holy anole" every time you see one, and you'll remember!

Anoles live in the Caribbean Islands as well as the southeastern U.S. from Texas to Virginia. In Texas, they range as far west as Central Texas and South Texas, and thanks to sticky pads on the bottom of their feet, anoles can generally be found on trees, shrubs, walls and rooftops. They generally prefer shady, moist areas and often completely blend in with nearby potted plants, but it's not uncommon to see them sunbathing during the morning hours. Although some folks keep them as pets, I much prefer they be able to roam free in a natural environment. As a youngster, I do remember one that used to come into Charlene Hitt's house in Longview and drink out of her dripping bathroom sink! Charlene was the mother of my friend and neighbor Charles Hitt. Having an indoor-outdoor lizard catching bugs does appeal to me.

Naturally, as children we couldn't help wanting to catch them. It's because of this and their own predators that anoles have tails that break away easily. Amazingly, the tails grow back, but often smaller, discolored and a bit deformed. Our favorite thing to do with them as kids was to let them bite our ears and hang there like earrings. Although it caused quite a stir with our squeamish peers, it actually hurt less than the old clothespins-on-the-ears trick. Once while giving a children's tour at the Mast Arboretum, I caught an anole and said, "Watch this!" To the children's squeals and delights, I paraded around with an anole dangling from my ear lobe. They said, "Doesn't that hurt?" I assured them it didn't (although it does a bit). To their horror, when I removed him, his tiny teeth made my ear bleed profusely, assuring that they'd never perform the stunt in a million years. As far as they were concerned, he'd just bitten off a piece of my ear!

**A green anole showing interest in a potential mate.**

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## Anole, *cont.*

I promise you they don't eat humans. They generally prefer small insects up to the size of crickets and June bugs. It's a small-scale horror movie watching them munch and swallow these guys. This is why it's important to be judicious and selective with insecticide use, as birds, spiders, toads, wasps and lizards all need live, healthy insects to dine on. These guys are nature's insecticide.

One would naturally assume anoles change colors to blend in with their environment, but the color change apparently has more to do with their temperature, mood and stress level. By far the most impressive color change they make takes place under their neck when the males project a bright pink dewlap during courtship and territorial displays. To make things more impressive, they often bob their heads up and down while their dewlap is displayed. My Emanis grandmother called this dewlap routine "showing their money." Anoles are very territorial. It seems to me the males spend more time strutting and posturing than they do foraging. You haven't seen a battle until you've seen two males in a miniature Komodo dragon fight. They don't do much damage to each other but certainly put on an entertaining performance. Of course, it's all about territory and females.

During the March to October breeding season, the females can lay an egg every two weeks, which takes five to eight weeks to hatch. Unfortunately, the female doesn't look after the egg or the baby lizards that immediately have to start hunting tiny insects to survive. So, keep your eyes peeled for green anoles both large and small. They are on our team!

## Children in the Gardens

By Kerry Lemon

Four teams of afterschool gardeners have been at work in SFA Gardens. Whether they were the Snow Peas, the Lettuce Girls, the Potato Heads or the Rocking Broccoli, each group learned about its particular vegetable, its growing habits, and planted, cared for and watered the vegetable.

As in most gardening experiences, the children had a few minor setbacks. Some hungry mammals (most likely deer or rabbits) munched on our first planting of broccoli, so protective cages were placed over a second round of broccoli planting. The lettuce and peas were slow to germinate but eventually grew well, and the potatoes had a couple of cold snaps that slowed them down. Two weeks with a broken water system followed a couple of hard rains with high winds. Nevertheless, the Lettuce Girls were able to harvest and share a delicious salad.

On a field trip to Appleby Community Farm, the kids met farmer Bryan Pruett and walked through his rows of organic veggies and herbs, which were swarming with bee pollinators. Everyone tasted a juicy, red strawberry and watched guineas and chickens rummage in the compost piles.

The afterschool group visited the Nacogdoches Farmers Market to see how local growers sell their produce to the community. Then we harvested potatoes, lettuce, a few snow peas and a little broccoli, which we cooked in our outdoor cooking class.

It was wonderful to see how the kids enjoyed the food they grew and expanded their eating experience to include new dishes. They were always eager to visit their garden plots, and the smiles on their faces told the whole story!

# Wild for White

By Dawn Stover

I'm not sure what it is about white flowers, but when I begin to list flowers that attract pollinators, I find some of the most attractive ones have white flowers. We don't give white much credit as a color, especially in the garden, but it certainly deserves a second thought.

White flowers bring out the true hue of any color it is partnered with, and other colors bring out the personality in white. Try pairing white flowers with blue or yellow ones. Notice that white will begin to harmonize with its companion. Using nothing but white flowers brings a calming elegance to the landscape. White is the perfect referee for competing colors in the garden, providing a resting place for the eyes between bright or conflicting hues. When summer rolls around, especially in the Gulf South, we tend to enjoy our garden in the early or late hours of the day when the sun isn't trying to beat us into submission. White flowers lend a light source to those hours in dawn and dusk, lighting up dark recesses and allowing us to venture farther into our landscape.

In my experience, pollinators are most attracted to flowers with white. These plants are abuzz with life, busy with myriad bees, butterflies, flies and beneficial wasps. It's pretty gratifying watching all those little winged creatures benefit from your gift to them in the form of nectar and pollen-rich flowers.

Rattlesnake master, *Eryngium yuccafolium*, provides architecture as well as nectar. Stately plants resemble yucca in foliage and give rise to branched stalks of tiny white flowers held in domed umbels. It is an indicator of high-quality, coastal prairie remnants. It also is a member of the parsley family, Apiaceae, which is known for abundant nectar and pollen for many beneficial insects, including predatory insects. It is a durable plant with a taproot that helps it tolerate dry soils once established. Rattlesnake master derives its name from American Indians and pioneers who used it as an antidote to rattlesnake venom, but that's not something I would necessarily recommend you try. Legend has it American Indians chewed the root and then blew on their hands in order to safely handle rattlesnakes.

**Rattlesnake master**

I wouldn't necessarily recommend trying this either.

Short-toothed mountain mint, *Pycnanthemum muticum*, has long been one of my favorite plants with its silvery bracts and spicily minted fragrance. The tiny, pink-tinted white flowers are produced in terminal clusters that are enhanced by a pair of lovely, silvery-white bracts. Plants tend to make themselves at home, spreading by rhizomes, especially in the right conditions, but are not as

**Short-toothed mountain mint**

aggressive as mint. Keeping plants slightly on the dry side will help keep them in check, as does root pruning in early spring. Plan on giving the plant a bit of room to make itself at home. American Indians used short-toothed mountain mint to treat fevers, colds and stomachaches. The leaves can be used to make a mild tea, but, while delicious, we aren't qualified to speak to its healing properties. This plant comes to life when in bloom, and gardeners will be able to witness all of the beneficial insects swarming amongst the tiny flowers.

While our first examples are summer bloomers, our last two are examples of late-season nectar sources. Common boneset, *Eupatorium perfoliatum,* and hyssop-leaf thoroughwort, *Eupatorium hyssopifolium,* begin blooming in late summer and persist until fall. Both plants present flat clusters of small,

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## White, *cont.*

fluffy, white flowers. Common boneset prefers a moist situation in dappled shade. If you visit the trails at the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center, you will undoubtedly find these blooming in sunny pockets as summer winds down. The name common boneset is derived from the belief that it had properties that would heal broken bones. All parts of the plant are toxic and extremely bitter. Hyssop-leaf thoroughwort can tolerate drier soils and some moisture as long as there is adequate drainage in either situation. Both are excellent cut flowers and are exceptionally underutilized in cultivation.

I hope I've encouraged an appreciation, or at least piqued your interest, for using white in the garden. All the plants I've mentioned are native to East Texas and are adapted for this wonderful climate of ours, including the nine months of summer we have. We will have most, if not all, of these available at our fall plant sale on Oct. 1. Hope to see you there!

## Upcoming events at the Brundrett Conservation Education Building, located at 2900 Raguet St. For reservations, call (936) 468-4129 or email sfagardens@sfasu.edu

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

**Oct. 1: Fall Festival Plant Sale** - Shop for rare plants and more at the Fall Festival Plant Sale from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center.

**Oct. 6: Special Garden Lecture** - Enjoy a special garden lecture with Brent Heath of Brent and Becky's Bulbs at 7 p.m. The cost is $10 and space is limited. Reservations are required.

**Nov. 5: Cheerful Winter Containers** - Discover the hows and whys of container gardening with Sharon Smith of Blue Moon Gardens from 9 a.m. to noon in her cheerful winter containers seminar. You can put your knowledge to the test as you create your own special garden to take home. The cost is $55 for SFA Gardens members and $65 for non-members.

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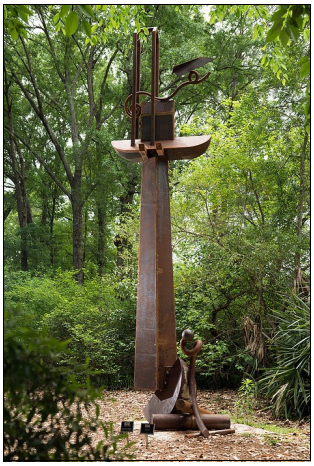
## Sculpture for All 2017-19

By Dawn Stover

It's been nearly two years since our latest Sculpture for All exhibition was installed. I have especially enjoyed juror Joe Barrington's piece, West Texas Shaman. Joe created the winning piece in our first exhibit with The Messenger, which is now in our permanent collection thanks to a wonderful patron.

Keeping with tradition, we have asked Dewane Hughes, winner of the second exhibition with his piece Swell, to juror the upcoming 2017-19 show.

We sent out a national call for entries in several sculpture venues, and our juror will pick the 10 best pieces. They will be installed before the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail begins in mid-March. Once the sculptures are in place, our juror will pick the best in show and two runners-up who will be announced at the show's opening reception, tentatively set for April 4, 2017.



**Swell by Dewane Hughes**

If you enjoy the unique complement the sculptures provide to our beautiful gardens, please consider a contribution to the campaign. We rely solely on donations to make this happen and are indebted to those who make this dream a reality. To donate indicate "Sculpture for All" when you call (936) 468-5406, visit www.sfasu.edu/give or mail checks to P.O. Box 6092, SFA Station, Nacogdoches, Texas 75962-6092.