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## SFA Gardens Newsletter, Jan 2006

SFA Gardens, Stephen F. Austin State University

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# 2006 Brings Great Changes

By Dr. David Creech

Through the years, the SFA Mast Arboretum and Pineywoods Native Plant Center have been blessed with two wonderful advisory boards. The board members come to us from the nursery and landscape industry, government agencies, the education profession, and from the university, Nacogdoches, and volunteer communities. They have been a barometer for the needs of the community, and they have provided sound advice along with generous amounts of support and encouragement. Many board members remember when there was no budget to discuss and the addition of a new wheelbarrow and shovel was cause for celebration. On January 20, the two boards met together in

the Agriculture Building and voted unanimously to join forces and become one board. Everyone agreed that this change will provide more cohesiveness, more clout, and more coordination of programming. (I personally was excited about going from eight board meetings a year to four.) Our SFA Mast Arboretum and Pineywoods Native Plant Center members will receive one combined newsletter and membership benefits will extend to both gardens.

I have always thought that everything here is just one big garden, anyway – so this obviously made sense from the beginning. Dan Angel, our past SFA President, once asked me, “Well, Dave, just how much land do you think you

really need to expand the garden?” My immediate response was, “all the land that touches us.”

While that might be a little extreme when you think about it, there is a kernel of truth in the thought. Public gardens are much more than just a place full of plants. They are full of people, plans, and programs. Just twenty years old, we’re way past the toddler stage, way past the terrible teens, and now we’re on our way to adulthood.

Look for great things to be happening in the years ahead. We have a great staff who work very hard and a herd of supporters who love the garden. We couldn’t ask for more.

## Grant Returns as PNPC Research Associate

After wandering around in the desert for several years, Greg Grant is finally back home. Greg is the new Pineywoods Native Plant Research Associate and he’s been on board since January 2, 2006. In terms of horticultural

talent SFA could hardly do better. Greg has a Bachelor’s and a Master’s degree in floriculture and horticulture, both from Texas A&M University – and he has attended post graduate classes at North Carolina State, Louisiana

State University, and Stephen F. Austin. Greg is a horticulturist, garden writer, lecturer, and farmer. He comes to us from his position as horticulturist with the Mercer Arboretum. As many of you know, Greg has enjoyed a varied career.

# Garden News

### Upcoming Events

- **Feb 16:** *Les Reeves Lecture Series: Camellias with Bobby Green*
- **Feb 20:** *Volunteer Orientation*
- **March 18:** *Bus trip to Dallas Arboretum and Dallas Blooms!*

**Garden News** is a newsletter about the horticultural gardens at Stephen F. State University:

**SFA Mast Arboretum**

**Pineywoods Native Plant Center**

**Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden**

**Jim and Beth Kingham Children’s Garden**



## Grant Returns (continued from page 1)

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He was the horticulturist at the San Antonio Botanic Gardens. He was an instructor with Stephen F. Austin State University just a few years ago and has taught at Louisiana State University. Greg was an award-winning horticulturist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. He was director of research and development for Lone Star Growers and did time in the same mode with the Antique Rose Emporium. Greg is co-author of *Home Landscaping-Texas* and *The Southern Heirloom Garden*, and is a regular contributor to *Texas Gardener*, *Ornamental Outlook*, and *Neil Sperry's Gardens* magazines. He has given over 1000 talks and seminars on horticultural topics throughout Texas and the South.

Greg is a graduate of the Benz School of Floral Design, a lifetime member of the Southern Garden History Society, and a member of the Native Plant Society of Texas. He has traveled to hundreds of public and private gardens throughout the world and has introduced a number of successful plants to the Texas nursery trade. Greg (along with his terriers Rosie and Lily) lives in the small Shelby County community of Arcadia in his grandparent's old farmhouse, where he looks after a few chickens, a patch of sugar cane, 83 bluebird houses, and a stand of rare trilliums. Take the time to welcome Greg on board!



## Spring Means Azalea Trail Time By Barb Stump

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Our weather has been so mild this "winter" that you would think it was already azalea time, but the official dates for the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail are more than a month off yet. Be sure to mark your calendars for these special Saturday events:

### March 18—Plant Sale

9:00 to noon—downtown Plaza Principal Square by the Convention and Visitors Bureau. Sponsored and organized by Flora Garden Club. Various area nurserymen will also be selling 30-plus varieties of azaleas at this time, and local garden clubs will bring their favorite perennials for sale.

### March 25—The Art of Floral Design, "Color and Textures from the Gardens"

10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 311 E. Main Street, Downtown Nacogdoches

Try your hand at displaying your favorite azaleas in new ways. Sponsored by the Nacogdoches Art League.

### April 1—Azalea Symposium, "Growing Healthy Azaleas"

8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the SFA Agriculture Building on Wilson Drive. Registration is \$25 and includes lunch, guided tour of the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, and a brief propagation workshop. To register, call the CVB at 936-564-7351. Sponsored by the SFA Mast Arboretum.

This year's Azalea Symposium will feature an SFA graduate, Bart Brechter, who is now curator of the Bayou Bend Gardens in Houston, Texas. He manages the historic formal landscape of camellias and azaleas with organic methods that you can try at home as well.

### Garden News

Now then, what's new in the garden? To help both visitors and tour guides enjoy the garden, we are developing permanent bed signs highlighting featured plantings or design principles. Our target for this work is to have as many of these National Park standard signs as possible installed in the garden as possible by tour-time.

Azalea Garden Technician Jon Roach and I have been planting

about 50 yellow and pink Aromi hybrid deciduous azaleas around the garden. We also continue to expand our Japanese maple and camellia collections. We now have a special sun-test plot for selected Japanese maples from Elizabeth Gardner's Acer Acres in North Carolina; 22 of her specimens that she thinks will stand up to our Zone 8b sun are now planted in a new bed right by the parking lot on the western side of the garden. This is a full western sun exposure. It will be a real test of their adaptability. Look next time you visit the garden for *Acer palmatum* 'Orangeola', 'Kazen nishiki', 'Aoyogi', and 'Hogyoku'.

### Help Show Off the Garden!

Our Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden is a featured centerpiece of the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail self-guided driving tours. But even, better, many visitors and tour groups call the Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau asking for guided tours. **This is looking to be a very busy year, so I'd like to invite everyone who loves azaleas to help me give**

## Azalea Trail (continued from page 2)

**these guided tours.** Many are astounded to find that the SFA Mast Arboretum has this wonderful resource and three other gardens! Some come from areas where azaleas are difficult—or nearly impossible—to grow, such as Dallas and Waco. We had one tour last year that was a Scandinavian tour that originated in Nebraska. It really is great fun to show them our multitude of azaleas, Japanese maples, and camellias.

If you can help with one or two tours (about 4 hours total) or more from March 15 through April 15, please give me a call or e-mail me. I'll hold an orientation session Thursday, March 9 at 9:30. Come meet me in the Council Ring and we'll go from there. You can reach me at 468-

4129; [bstump@sfasu.edu](mailto:bstump@sfasu.edu).

### Wanted! Great Digital Azalea Garden Pictures

Here's your chance at Arboretum garden fame and one of the volunteer opportunities that might be most fun and most rewarding! I need your digital images—at as high a resolution as you have available—of the azaleas, camellias, and Japanese maples in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. Your fame will come when we put your image on one of our 45 bed signs or in our revised azalea garden brochure. Undoubtedly there are lots of images in your files at home. I need you to look at them again and see if they might help our visitors see the beauties of the garden. What we mainly need are close-ups, but for some signs the "long view" or land-

scape image is also really helpful. Just take a look at what you've been photographing and send it to me by e-mail or give me a call.



Native deciduous azalea selection of *Rhododendron canescens* now being marketed as 'Vernadoes Phlox Pink', which will be in the April 22 Mast Arboretum Plant Sale. Also a heavy bloomer in Bed 27 of the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. (Photo by Dave Creech)

## Springing into Love with Redbuds By Greg Grant

The redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) is a universally loved small tree. The species is named for its native Canada. It's the state tree of Oklahoma, where it's also native. And, we have three different native varieties in Texas, where it's home to its own festival in Denton each March.

The genus name *Cercis* is the ancient name for the closely related European Judas tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*), from which, according to tradition, Judas hung himself. The eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) can be found along streams and bottomlands from West Texas to Florida and north to Ontario. That's quite a range. But when you are pretty everybody wants you around! That explains why the eastern redbud has been in cultivation since 1641.

According to the late Robert Vines (*Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of the Southwest*, UT Press, 1960), redbud flowers were sometimes pickled for salads and even eaten fried in Mexico. Of course I'd eat anything fried. The flowers also have some value as a nectar source for honey. Not to be left out, the seeds are eaten by numerous species of wild birds and the foliage is

browsed upon by the white-tailed deer. At one time the redbud was even appreciated for its medicinal value as it served as a treatment for dysentery, and its bark was used as an astringent.

Most euphoric observers of springtime think "a redbud is a redbud," but it's not. Texas is very unique in that we have three distinct varieties of redbud growing naturally in the state. The pineywoods of East Texas is home to the typical eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis canadensis*), common to the eastern half of the country. It tends to



*Cercis canadensis texensis* 'Oklahoma'

prefer acid, well drained soils and regular moisture. It can be recognized by its medium-sized, dull green leaves which, like all redbuds, emerge after the showy blossoms have fallen.

Central Texas and southern Oklahoma both claim the Texas redbud (*Cercis canadensis texensis*, formerly *C. reniformis* and *C. texensis*). This unique native is characterized by its medium sized, glossy-green leaves and it's ability to tolerate drier, more alkaline soils. This makes it more suited to the harsher conditions of Dallas-Fort Worth, Austin, and San Antonio landscapes.

West Texas and northern Mexico sport our most unique native redbud. The Mexican redbud (*Cercis canadensis mexicana*) has small fuzzy leaves with wavy margins. This adaptation helps it conserve water in its drier habitat. It too is uniquely adapted to alkaline soils. All three varieties can be grown in the acid, more moist, soils of East Texas as well.

All of these native gems have similar flowers in early spring. Typical redbud flowers aren't red of course. They are

## Redbuds (continued)

normally in the purple-pink range but can be rosy-pink or white as well. The tiny pea-like flowers usually smother the tree with splendor before any foliage has developed.

Although redbuds are spectacular in the early spring, they are a bit nondescript during the summer and claim only modest yellow foliage during the fall. To perform best, redbuds prefer well drained soils with fairly regular irrigation to keep leaves from dropping. They aren't terribly long-lived trees but are certainly worth having in the landscape. Volunteer seedlings are generally eagerly waiting to take the place of any old trees that eventually die of canker. If the standard Texas redbuds don't float your boat, consider these alternatives.

**Oklahoma redbud (*Cercis canadensis texensis* 'Oklahoma')**: This glossy foliaged, grafted selection from southern Oklahoma has the showiest purple-pink flowers of all.



*Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy'

**Texas White redbud (*Cercis canadensis texensis* 'Texas White')**: This selection has pristine white flowers before attractive glossy green foliage. It's wonderful for somewhat shady situations or against dark backdrops.

**Weeping Texas redbud (*Cercis canadensis texensis* 'Traveller')**: This rare Dan Hosage introduction has a beautiful weeping habit to complement its

showy pink flowers and shiny green leaves.

**Double redbud (*Cercis canadensis* 'Flame'/'Plena')**: The flowers on this unique cultivar look like tiny little double pink roses.

**Forest Pansy redbud (*Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy')**: This popular cultivar sports spectacular purple foliage in the spring, generally turning dark green in the heat of summer. The foliage is showier than the flowers!

**Mail Order Source (21 different kinds of redbuds!):**

Forest Farm

990 Tetherow Rd.

Williams, Oregon 97544-9599

541-846-7269

[www.forestfarm.com](http://www.forestfarm.com)

Volunteers are vital to the operation of the SFA Mast Arboretum and Pineywoods Native Plant Center, and it is

## Green Thumbs and Garden Guides Needed

The SFA Mast Arboretum and Pineywoods Native Plant Center staff and volunteers invite area residents to join some great people and gorgeous plants in the garden for the Spring 2006 new volunteer orientation. The orientation will be held on February 20 at 9:00 a.m. in the Tucker House at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center, 2900 Raguet. Elyce Rodewald, Education Coordinator, explains, "We have a wide range of volunteer opportunities for people of all ages—from propagating plants to giving tours and helping with plant sales. You don't have to have a green thumb or extensive plant knowledge to volunteer—just the willingness to learn."

The orientation will include a brief overview of the program, a tour of the Pineywoods Native Plant Center with Greg Grant, Research Associate, and a tour of the Arboretum and horticultural

facilities with Dr. David Creech, Director. Barb Stump, Research Associate, will discuss volunteer opportunities in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, and Elyce Rodewald will demonstrate educational programs given by tour guides

Anyone interested in attending the orientation should make a reservation by calling the Education Office at 936-468-1832 or emailing [erodewald@sfasu.edu](mailto:erodewald@sfasu.edu).



Gerry and Ramona Peacock, SFA Mast Arboretum volunteers, label plants for the Garden Gala Day Plant Sale.

# Many Hands Make Light Work

easy to find evidence of volunteers in the gardens—manicured flower beds, a honeybee observation hive, a greenhouse full of healthy seedlings or even freshly painted Easter decorations in the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Demonstration Garden. They help with mailings, update data bases, develop brochures, and provide refreshments for the very popular Les Reeves Lecture Series.

Some might consider gardening “dirty work,” but not our volunteers! Peg Kern said, “I thoroughly enjoy volunteering at the SFA Mast Arboretum. There are always opportunities to learn something new. The staff and students are first-rate to work with and are very appreciative of your efforts. The volunteers are a great crew. It’s just a lot of fun!”

Plant sales are a major undertaking, and our volunteers give new meaning to the phrase “many hands make light work.” Volunteers carefully move thousands of plants from the greenhouse to the intramural fields in just a few hours. The plants are organized, watered, labeled, and ready for the early-morning shoppers. On plant sale day, an army of ticket writers and cashiers keep customers moving quickly through the check out lanes.

Other volunteers focus on educating young people. Last year, over 8,000 students participated in an education program hosted by the SFA Mast Arboretum or Pineywoods Native Plant Center. Using hands-on activities, volunteers encourage students to explore the natural world. Soil comes to life as students find earthworms and create their own “soil soup.” Fear of honeybees is replaced with respect as students

watch worker bees sip nectar from flowers and carry pollen back to the hive. A new appreciation of native plants and native peoples emerges as students learn about yuccas, cattails, and making rope from native grasses.

very busy people and their time is valuable to them. So whether they spend 3 hours or 300 hours with us, we feel very fortunate that they choose to spend that time with us in support of the gardens and our programs.”

*“The volunteer program at the Arboretum has introduced me to a multitude of exciting new plants, fellow gardening enthusiasts, and the confidence to propagate new plants for my own garden and our blueberry patch. I truly look forward to my weekly visits as well as the variety of volunteering opportunities that arise throughout the year.”*

*Sherrie Randall*

Our Advisory Board, in addition to providing advice, support, and encouragement, hosts the annual Fall Fandango—a delightful evening of delicious food, music and merriment in the Arboretum. This event increases in popularity every year and provides yet another good reason to become a Friend of the Arboretum and Pineywoods Native Plant Center.



*Volunteer Roger Hughes constructs garden benches. Whether volunteers are in the garden, in the greenhouse, educating children, or performing “other duties as assigned,” smiles can be found in abundance at the Arboretum and Pineywoods Native Plant Center.*

Approximately 125 volunteers donated over 5500 hours of time in 2005. This is the equivalent of 2.6 full time employees or over \$93,000. Dr. Creech and staff recently honored these dedicated volunteers at a banquet. Elyce Rodewald, Education Coordinator, noted “We are so fortunate to have this amazing group of volunteers. They are all



*Volunteer Maya Lemon relaxes with campers in their debris hut. Pineywoods Camp introduces children ages 5-16 to the natural world during a week-long day camp.*

# Garden Seminars

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Grow your garden of knowledge by attending an SFA Mast Arboretum Garden Seminar! In-depth programs provide practical information to gardeners in all stages of growth—from beginner to experienced. Seminar space is limited, so advance registration is required. To register, contact the education office at 936-468-1832; email [erodewald@sfasu.edu](mailto:erodewald@sfasu.edu); or send payment with name, address, daytime phone number, and seminar title to: SFA Mast Arboretum-Garden Seminars, PO Box 13000-SFA, Nacogdoches, TX 75962-3000. To learn more about becoming a member of the Friends of the SFA Mast Arboretum and SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center call the education office at 936-468-1832.



**March 18: Dallas Blooms!** Celebrate spring at the Dallas Arboretum, one of top floral display gardens in North America. Dallas Blooms features more than 400,000 spring-blooming bulbs, 20,000 spring-flowering azaleas, 70,000 pansies and violas and thou-

sands of other spring blooming annuals and perennials. This year's festival theme is "Proud as a Peacock," featuring two 15-foot peacock topiaries whose tails are 2100 square feet and 800 square feet filled with spectacular spring flowers. Leave the Agriculture Building at 8:00 a.m. and return by 6:30 p.m. Trip includes transportation, entrance to the Dallas Arboretum, lunch with speaker, and guided tour of the Arboretum and historic DeGolyer House. Members \$55. Non-members \$70

**April 8: Native Plant Field Trip to Ivy Payne Preserve** This Natural Area Preservation Association preserve contains diverse habitats from mesic creek bottoms to upland prairies. Heinz Gaylord, our guide and expert naturalist, expects to find spring ephemerals (mayapples, trout lilies, ghost iris), a wide variety of tree species, numerous wildflowers, and the state-endangered false horse gentian (*Triosteum perfoliatum*). We will depart from the Agriculture at 9:00 a.m. and return by 4:00 p.m. Transportation and lunch are provided and restroom facilities are available at the Preserve. Members \$25. Non-members \$35.

**July 15: Floral Design with Natives** Why purchase foreign-grown, pesticide-laden cut flowers when your yard, pasture, and woods are full of a wide range of useful and beautiful materials for

making artful botanical displays in your home and garden? From possum haw berries to buckeye blooms, East Texas is home to a plethora of fantastic plants for designing. Join Greg Grant for an educational and fun filled look at the many possibilities. Members \$25. Non-members \$35

**September 16: Landscaping Is for the Birds!** There's nothing as soothing as the sweet melody of song birds in the landscape, or the flash of a cardinal on a winter day. Come join Greg Grant and learn how to make your landscape more attractive to our fine feathered friends. While you're there get him to share the torrid details of his lifelong, passionate love affair with bluebirds. Be there or be blue! Members \$20. Non-members \$30.

**December 2: Deck the Halls: Using Evergreens to Decorate for the Holidays** Evergreen branches and garlands once served as symbols of enduring life and a fruitful year to come. Join Dawn Stover, Research Associate at the SFA Mast Arboretum, to learn how to create elegant wreaths and garlands using materials from mother nature. Learn principles of wreath, garland, and centerpiece construction and make a wreath to enjoy at home for the holidays. 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Room 118, Agriculture Building, Wilson Drive. Members \$25. Non-members \$35.

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## Wisely Gazebo Under Construction By Barb Stump

Our newest landmark is a beautiful 18-foot-diameter octagonal cedar and redwood gazebo perched at the new gateway to the Arboretum on Wilson Drive. The gazebo provides an ideal resting and gathering spot with a great view of the Arboretum's hillside gardens and the SFA intramural fields. The long set of stairs leading from the gazebo to the intramural fields are perfect for memorable wedding, graduation, and family photos.

Horticulture major Chris Jones is currently working on stonework terraces,

which we will fill with purple and white azaleas and other ornamentals to add even more dimension to events held in the gazebo.

The contractor on the project has been Rodney Broussard Construction, who has completed the project with fine craftsmanship. This gazebo has been made possible through the generous Azalea Garden endowment created by Dorothy Wisely in 2000. We will have an official dedication during the April 22 Garden Gala Day Plant Sale.



# What are Wetlands and Why Should I Care? By Greg Grant

Wetlands are lands that are generally inundated with water for a significant part of the growing season. They typically support vegetation adapted to saturated conditions and contain soils that have developed in the absence of oxygen. They are found from the tundra to the tropics and on every continent except Antarctica. Wetlands typically include swamps, marshes, and bogs.

Often called “nurseries of life,” wetlands provide habitat for thousands of species of both aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals. Although wetlands are best known for being home to waterlilies, turtles, frogs, snakes, and alligators, they also provide important habitat for waterfowl, fish, and mammals. Migrating birds use wetlands for resting and feeding during their cross-continental journeys and as nesting sites when they are at home. As a result, wetland loss has a serious impact on these species. Habitat degradation since the 1970s has been a leading cause of species extinction.

East Texas bottomland forests, similar to the one at the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center, once helped

support red wolves, black bears, Carolina parakeets, passenger pigeons, panthers, wild turkey, and the majestic ivory-billed woodpecker. Most of these species need large expanses of unspoiled wilderness to thrive, and they have been severely impacted by modern timber practices,



*Volunteers, Dylan Baggett and Forest Lemon, enjoy an early morning visit to the PNPC wetland.*

human development, and conversion of bottomland forests to agricultural lands.

Wetlands do more than provide habitat for plants and animals in the watershed. When rivers overflow, wet-

lands help to absorb and slow floodwaters. This ability to control floods can significantly prevent property damage and loss and can even save lives. Wetlands also absorb excess nutrients, sediment, and other pollutants before they reach rivers, lakes, and oceans. They are great spots for fishing, canoeing, hiking, and bird-watching, and they make wonderful outdoor classrooms for people of all ages.

The wetland area at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center serves as a natural filter for runoff from the greenhouse and nursery pad and also as a living laboratory for area students. Our wetlands education program, called Wild About Wetlands, is an in-depth investigation where students learn about hydric soils, characteristic wetland plants, the importance of watersheds, using macro-invertebrates as indicators of wetland health, and the challenges of land use planning.

You don't have to be a student to enjoy the wetlands at the PNPC. The boardwalk is an excellent spot for early morning bird watching, especially with the recent installation of new bluebird houses. If you are especially quiet, you may also hear the chorus of frogs and spot our resident deer, rabbits, and raccoons.



## Graduate Student Searches for Medicinal Plants

Kim Benton has been working on her master's degree in horticulture since she arrived here in spring of 2005. She is doing both field and laboratory research to screen plants that are native to the United States for camptothecin (CPT). She is working with both Dr. Creech and Dr. Shiyu Li, SFA Forestry Research Professor and Director of the National Center for Pharmaceutical Crops. Since most known plant sources for CPT are tropical, collecting and screening 100 natives will be challenging. But Kim is up to it. Her target species right now are in the Cornaceae (dogwood) and Nyssa (tupelo, black gum) families. Kim says if they can identify a native source it will be foundational research and an important contribution to cancer research and treatment. Screening for CPT is done by using TLC (thin-layer chromatography), done in Dr. Li's lab.

She is an East Texan through and through, since her family moved to Huntington from Pasadena when she was only two. She is a graduate of Kennard High School and the University of Texas at Dallas. She worked in Fort Worth in the advertising industry but realized that her life-long interest in plants meant she was destined for horticulture. She says she hopes she has inherited her mother's ability to root nearly anything. Her favorite botanic gardens—after the SFA Mast Arboretum, of course—are the Fort Worth Botanic Garden and the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, Arizona.

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<http://arboretum.sfasu.edu>

# Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden SFA Mast Arboretum Stephen F. Austin State University



**SFA MAST  
ARBORETUM**

**Come visit during the Nacogdoches  
Azalea Trail March 18-April 1, 2006**