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A Mexico Adventure - part 2

By Dr. David Creech

The June 11 – 26, 2006 adventure to the mountains and deserts of Mexico seems oh so long ago! First, I am quick to admit an expedition to get up close and friendly with sharp spiny plants in their very thorny habitat would never be at the top of my list. River bottoms and gentle hills are more my cup of tea. Yet, I have to say I've now warmed to the landscape charm of Agaves, Dasylirions, Yuccas, Hesperaloes, and all the other spikey critters that call the West and Mexico home. I'm over the OUCH syndrome. Here are a few notes made on a few of the 21 species encountered during this trip.

Agave americana, century plant, is the big fellow and can be found in urban and rural landscapes across Mexico and in the drier climates in the southwestern USA, all the way across the south to the more humid spots in the southeast. While *Agave americana* ssp. *protoamericana* – very closely related - is documented in scattered populations across the San Madre Oriental mountain range, the exact native home range of century plant is still disputed. That being said, no one disputes the fact that the species enjoys world wide distribution



as a plant for fiber, ornament or barrier. The species can become huge – 8' to 10' wide – and can be amazingly hardy. Century plant sports wide grey leaves with stiff terminal spines and recurved teeth along the margins. There are numerous specimens scattered here and there in the gardens of our region of East Texas. Century plant prefers full sun and very well drained soils; an outcrop or berm is best.

Agave celsii, is a special succulent pea green smoothie native to near Queretaro in Mexico and reported to be hardy in Zone 8b. Generally the plant grows to 2' high and 3' wide. While the species has been totally hardy in our nursery yard, it must be considered best for the full western face of a warm building.

Time will tell.

Agave montana is native to Nuevo Leon, Mexico and found at elevations up to 9000' on the highest peaks in pine and oak forests. Reaching 3' high and 6' wide, the highly toothed species leaves imprints of unfolding leaves that are quite striking. Reported to be hardy in Zones 7b and warmer.

Agave parrasana is a smaller species reaching no more than three feet tall. It's rather uncommon in cultivation and reported in only a few locales in southeastern Coahuila, Mexico. The species is however secure in the garden and plant collector's world. Adapted to Zones 7b and warmer, the species forms a tight steel blue cabbage-like

Fabulous Fall Festival - Plant Sale!

- October 7, 2007, 9 am until 2 pm

Less Reeves Lecture Series

- October 19 - Keith Hansen
- November 16 - Dawn Stover
- December 14 - David Creech

Garden Seminar

- December 2 - Deck the Halls with Dawn Stover

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

SFA Mast Arboretum

Pineywoods Native Plant Center

Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden

Jim and Beth Kingham Children's Garden

A Mexico Adventure—continued



Agave celsii

rosette sporting large sharp teeth. The species is quick to offset.

Agave parryi, Parry's Agave, is a bizarre globular artichoke-looking desert lily and the species dots the hillsides in informal singles and colonies. Found only along the Durango-Zacatecas border in Mexico, this species grows in grasslands at 7500 feet and is reported hardy to 10° F. At one of our stops (29° 21.672N; 106° 28.825 W at 5218' elevation), Parry's Agave was found scattered like so many artichokes in the brush and rocks of a mountain desert. In fact, after carefully comparing the site with the one in Gentry's book, we discovered we were looking at the exact same site on the Cumbres de Majalca as when Gentry took the photograph in 1971 for his book! Reaching a little over 2.5' wide, this is a bizarre desert lily that forms a tight nearly round rosette with about 100-160 leaves held tight and close to each other. The species, depending on its source, can be extremely cold tolerant and long lived in the landscape.



Agave parryi

Agave scabra reaches 3' tall and 5 to 6' wide. It sports thick, wide, gray-green leaves that are rough on the back side. The leaves are edged with recurved teeth and end in a stout sharp terminal spine. The species suckers freely. *Agave scabra* is quite common in the Chihuahuan desert of northeastern Mexico, generally found at 3600 to 4700'. This species should be considered a smaller alternative to *Agave americana* and is quite hardy with reports of survival to 0°F in our region.

Agave salmiana, Maguey de pulque, can reach over six feet tall and ten feet wide. The species is known in wild and cultivated forms from several states in northern and central Mexico and can be found in gardens both in Mexico and the southwestern USA. Leaves are about a foot wide and three feet long blessed with heavy brown teeth and a vicious terminal spine. This is the source of pulque, a vile drink known for its mild hallucinations and ability to create cheerfulness. Reported to be hardy to 0°F.

Agave victoria-reginae is native to the Chihuahuan desert in Mexico often found on rocky slopes at 4000' to 5000'. Normally reaching only 18 inches high and wide, this is one of the best ornamentals for a small area. Hardy to Zones 8a and warmer, this very long-lived species should be given as much sun as possible and watered sparingly. At one location near Saltillo (25° 34.328N – 100° 51.8189W, 4587' elevation), I stumbled into one specimen with striking dark black leaf tips more dramatic than others encountered.

Agave xylonacantha is found in the states of Hidalgo and San Luis Potosi in Mexico. Given a warm spot to call home, this species is smaller, blessed with strappy 5' wavy leaves, and known to tolerate dappled shade conditions. The most striking characteristic is an arsenal of wicked double pointed spines surrounded by a white and papery sheath.

How to grow them: Agaves need to be planted high and dry. A berm of loose rocks and gravel is not a bad choice and full western exposure is usually to their liking. For those marginally hardy types, the full western face of a warm building might be best. In our region of Texas, count on never watering the plant. Most important, Agaves are amazingly quite tolerant of glyphosate which makes weed control a snap. As long as the weed killer is roughly directed away from the plant and nowhere near the center of the rosette, I've never seen damage of any importance. Agave snout weevil hasn't reared his ugly head in this garden, but this pest is a growing problem in the southwest and is controlled by annual applications of several systemic insecticides.



Agave americana var. protoamericana

Where can you buy Agaves? Well, for both the common and uncommon, mail order is the simplest way to get a range of Agaves - and all the other desert lilies. Here's a lot of information:

www.cistus.com

www.Starr-Nursery.com

www.Yuccado.com

www.Plantdelights.com

References:

www.MSWN.com

Gentry, Howard Scott. 1982, Agaves of Continental North America. University of Arizona Press, Tuscon, AZ. Reprinted in 2003. 670 pp.

Irish, Mary and Gary. Agaves, Yuccas, and Related Plants. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon. 312 pp.

Fabulous Fall Festival

By Dawn Stover

Fall is here! It's official as of September 23rd, and it's unofficial from the wonderful fall-like temperatures we're having. Hallelujah! Did you ever think the prospect of a long-sleeved shirt first thing in the morning would be so exciting?

Have you ever wondered why we are so attracted to planting things in the spring? Sure we need to plant our warm season annuals and vegetables then, but what about the rest of our landscape? The trees, shrubs, and perennials that reward us year after year? Perhaps our friends to the north publish more gardening tips, perhaps our southern roots yearn to be out of doors after even the smallest of cold spells, or perhaps that's just what our moms and grandmas told us to do. I think I might be preaching to the choir a bit in this venue, but in our area, fall is the best time to plant the bones of our garden. Plants have six months to establish their root systems before the next trying summer sets in. That's a huge leg up over the six weeks, or less, we might be able to offer at a spring planting.

OK, so that was a subtle hint for you to come to our next plant sale, October 7th at 9 am, and pick up some of the "bones" to plant in your garden this fall. This Fabulous Fall Festival is packed with over 200 varieties of some really unusual plants. That's a daunting number to try to think about, so think about it in terms of what you are trying to achieve. I'll categorize some possible objectives you may be thinking about, and then identify plants that may help you achieve your goals.

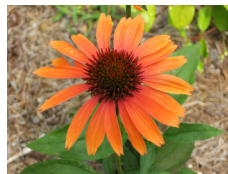
Water Wise Landscaping – with increasingly drier summers, it's sometimes hard to keep some things alive in your yard. We have a great selection of seriously drought tolerant plant material, if dragging water hoses in August doesn't thrill you. *Agave striata*, *Agave celsii*, *Yucca rostrata*, *Yucca thompsoniae*, and *Yucca filamentosa* 'Color Guard' are several woody lilies that will thrive in a non-irrigated, sunny, and well-drained location. The flame acanthus (*Anisacathus wrightii*), firebush (*Hamelia patens*), Rodney's aster (*Aster praelatus*), evergreen centaurea (*Centaurea gymnocarpa*), snake herb (*Dyschoriste linearis*), lantana (*Lantana spp.*), Turk's cap (*Malva viscus spp.*),



Lantana 'Star Landing'

perennial black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), woolly stemodia (*Stemodia tomentosa*), and many of the sages (*Salvia spp.*) are all wonderful perennial choices with lower water requirements than most. Trees that are especially drought tolerant are the 'Bubba' desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*) and the chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*).

Butterfly Gardening – Sometimes we need a little more ornament in the garden than even flowers can provide. I personally feel most gratified when butterflies flit through my landscape. Some excellent nectar sources are: almond bush (*Aloysia virgata*), all asters and garden mums (*Aster spp.* and *Chrysanthemum spp.*), summer-sweet (*Clethra sp.*), coneflowers including the fantastic new yellow and orange varieties (*Echinacea x 'Harvest Moon'* and 'Sundown'), Firebush, Mexican Plume and Mexican Honeysuckle (*Justicia spp.*), lantana, Peter's purple monarda (*Monarda*), garden phlox (*Phlox pilosa*), any sage, and chaste tree.



Echinacea 'Sundown'

Hummingbirds – Most anything in the butterfly section can be included. The BEST flowers for those winged daredevils can be found on the firebush, Turk's cap, garden phlox, flame acanthus and Mexican petunia (*Ruellia brittoniana*).

Shade Gardening – Our shade selections keeps growing! For groundcovers, try striped weeping sedge (*Carex oshimensis* 'Evergold'), Japanese forest grass (*Hakanachloe macra* 'All Gold'), leopard plant (*Farfugium japonicum*), and peacock ginger (*Kaempferia spp.*). For the exotic



Hakonachloe macra

look, try the lotus-leaf begonia (*Begonia nelumbifolia*), the giant leopard plant (*Farfugium japonicum* 'Gigantea'), and the lime zinger elephant ear (*Xanthosoma mafafa* 'Aurea'). There are also plenty of familiar shade lovers with azaleas (*Rhododendron spp.*) and hydrangeas (*Hydrangea spp.*). Barb's article in this newsletter goes into greater depths about the azaleas, especially those fabulous deciduous azaleas!

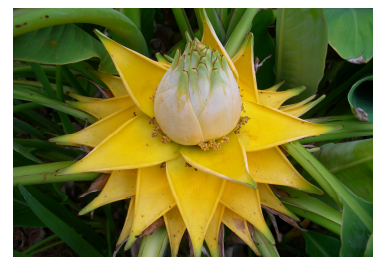
Tropicalismo! – For that lush sizzling look try any of the gingers. The hidden gingers (*Curcuma spp.*) are excellent performers in our region and can take part shade to full blazing sun. Their flowers are amazing spectacles and the foliage is equally as beautiful. There are limited numbers of butterfly gingers (*Hedychium*), shell gingers (*Alpinia*), and peacock gingers (*Kaempferia*) available. The Chinese yellow banana (*Musella lasiocarpa*) is diminutive in relation to the banana world, topping out at about 5 feet, with really unique yellow blooms. The two cannas we will offer are two of the BEST cannas to grow.



Curcuma australasica

Canna x 'Australia' has vibrant, coppery red foliage even through the summer, and *Canna x 'Pink Sunburst'* is a knee high little guy with cool, striped foliage and pretty pink flowers.

Of course we'll be around to help with your questions, but having a game plan in mind will definitely help us help you. We hope to see you on October 7th!



Musella lasiocarpa

Take a Walk on the Wild Side

By Elyce Rodewald

A Raguet Elementary School student makes a leisurely detour on his bicycle. Retirees from Missouri stop to meet some Texas natives. An energetic black lab frolics with his owner, and a young couple pauses to admire a bluebird feeding near the marsh. These people have discovered one of the best-kept secrets in Nacogdoches—the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center and its brand new recreational trail.

Over two miles of universally accessible trails now wind through the PNPC. The trail follows the creek through the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Demonstration Garden, then winds extensively through the oak-hickory bottomland eventually returning to the upland meadow and constructed wetland. The trail includes three creek crossings and two large observation decks, perfect places to watch for birds and other wildlife. The trail is accessible from Raguet Street and Lanana Creek Trail. Parking is available near the Forest Resources Institute and the horticultural facility.

Dr. Mike Legg and Dr. David Creech, project co-directors, are enthusiastic about the benefits of the new trail system. Dr. Legg said, “This is a unique site and a one-of-a-kind trail in Nacogdoches. Area school children and SFA



New trails at the PNPC - photo by Kay Jeffrey

college students already use the PNPC as an outdoor classroom and living laboratory. We expect the trails to attract many, many new visitors including walkers, joggers,

bicyclers, and skateboarders as well as people interested in bird watching, native plants, and other nature studies.”

Dr. Creech noted, “The design and construction of the trails has been a cooperative venture involving community and university resources. We have had enormous support from the SFA Physical Plant and John Boyette and his crew at the Texas Forest Service. Vic Shepherd, SFA transportation manager, is an asphalt artist, and it is exciting to watch him and his crew work. Forestry graduate student Kevin Allen has been building bridges through the heat of the summer. Numerous other student workers as well as Greg Grant and Elyce Rodewald have played a big role in trail development and construction. The project was funded through a Texas Parks and Wildlife Recreational Trails Grant with matching funds from the PNPC and Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture.”

Some of the trail components are still under construction. Bridges, interpretive and directional signage, benches, and accessible parking spaces are coming soon. In the meantime, the trails are definitely open for business—dawn to dusk, 365 days a year. Make plans now to take a walk on the wild side at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center!

2007 Les Reeves Lecture Series

January 18 - Great plants can come from the Great Plains! - Steve Bieberich

February 15 - Taking all the right paths to that perfect garden - Mary Anne Pickens

March 15 - Landscape Like a Pro! - Steve Dobbs

April 19 - Art and Science: Redoute - Barney Lipscomb

May 17 - Colorful Gardens for Sun or Shade - Bill Welch

June 21 - Woody and Herbaceous Gems for the Landscape - Mike Schnelle

July 19 - Palms, the Princes of the Plant Kingdom—Grant Stephenson

August 16 - It's 118 in the Shade and all I Can Think is Why am I Here? - George Hull

September 20 - White Shadows, Twin Dragons, & a Really Mad Hatter: Discovering the Beauty & Mystery of Chandor Gardens - Steven Chamblee

October 18 - Improving Plants for Southern Gardens - Cecil Pounders

November 15 - Lotus: The Whole World Gets it but US - Ken Tilt

December 20 - Mexico, China and Baseball - Ain't Life Grand? - David Creech



Fall is Fabulous for Planting Azaleas

By Barbara Stump

Now is the best time to plant azaleas for spring bloom. The cooler, wetter months of November through March gives plants a good chance to grow healthy roots and become established. After all, they are essentially just small woody plants; this is the same planting advice we give for planting out trees. If you plant now, you'll have less hand-watering to do. Plant azaleas in holes a little wider than the root ball, disturbing or "teasing out" the roots a bit so it will be easier for them to grow into your soil. Finally, do not plant in a poorly-draining clay soil. **They must have very good drainage;** all you have to do is plant them a little high, on little "hills" and mulch thinly. Fertilize at planting with an organic slow-release fertilizer, or wait until after they have flowered in the spring to apply an acidic chemi-

cal fertilizer product. There are several on the market especially formulated for acid-loving plants like azaleas, camellias, and Japanese maples.

Yes, we will have azaleas in the Fabulous Fall Festival. We have a nice selection of Encore™ azaleas that repeat-bloom, from the brand-new double-pink 'Autumn Belle' to older varieties 'Autumn Coral' and 'Autumn Embers' (red). We also will have more of the yellow deciduous azaleas.

Remember in your plantings to include contrast, either with foliage color or flower color. A great foil for any colored azalea, no matter how brilliant, is the ice-white of the Southern Indica 'Mrs. G. G. Gerbing.' This is bullet-proof in the Southern landscape, even in sunny locations; the single

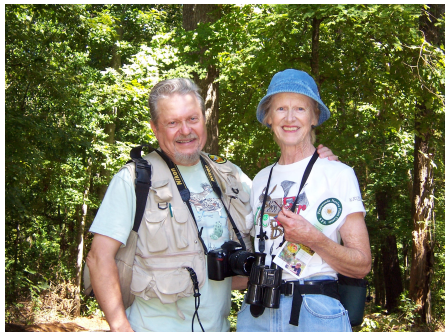
large flowers seem to dance over dense, dark green foliage on graceful arching branches. Just remember these will get up to 8' by 8' in size, so plant them where they will show to advantage (and not block your windows or driveway).



Rhododendron x 'Mrs. G. G. Gerbing' can be found at the Fabulous Fall Festival.

PNPC Update

By Greg Grant



Bob and Ruby Ball visit the PNPC

On a bright beautiful Wednesday September 19 we had our first REAL out of town visitors. Bob and Ruby Ball of Springfield, Missouri came to explore our new trails. Both are volunteer naturalists at the Missouri Department of Conservation Nature Center in Springfield. Ruby is in charge of the native plant gardens while Bob is a nature photographer. After a nice chat, I sent them home with a few Texas-Missouri native plants. They found out about us from the new *Prairies and Pinewoods Wildlife Trails-East* map available created by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. You can purchase copies of the map (plus other Texas locations) at <http://tcebookstore.org>

or by calling (888)900-2577. I expect many more out of town visitors in the future. We really are a diamond in the rough here.

Yahoo!!! The two-plus miles of asphalt trails are finally finished here. One bridge is finished, one is almost finished, and one still needs a good bit of work.

We already have bikers, joggers, and walkers making use of the trails. Unfortunately very few heeded our flagging tape and signs pleading to wait for the trails to harden and cure. We are currently trying to seed some cool season grass along the edges where erosion is going to be a problem. I'm afraid we've had some unwanted visitors on four wheelers too. NO ATV's or dirt bikes of any kind are allowed on the trails. Please help us police and preserve our wonderful new trails. Littering has already become a problem as well. I can't fathom the idea of people tossing cans, bottles, and trash into the pretty "Tucker Woods" but that's exactly what is happening. We will see about getting some trash cans to help manage this growing problem.

We are very much in need of volunteers at the PNPC! We desperately need help with

trail upkeep and invasive exotic removal. Although Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*) is our primary pest we have plenty of Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*), Chinese tallow (*Sapium sebiferum*), Mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*), and others that need to be eliminated. The future of our wild hyacinths (*Camassia scilloides*) and dog-tooth violets (*Erythronium americanum*) depends on it. We also need help maintaining our display beds. I'm hoping we'll eventually have a volunteer adopt each individual them bed. We still have to finish our "Firewise" landscape in the backyard as well as renovating the Xeric, Mesic, and Riparian beds in the front yard. Our fully functioning nursery can always use volunteers seeding, potting, grooming, and weeding as well. Of course our budget is minimal and we can always use financial assistance too. We did get a used Gator vehicle from the arboretum which will make life much more bearable here. 40 acres is a lot of ground to cover.

If you'd like to be on my PNPC e-mail list for updates, announcements, and requests, please e-mail me at

ggrantgardens@yahoo.com.

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<http://arboretum.sfasu.edu>



Members mark your calendars!

**Fall
Fandango**

**November 3
2006**

7-9 pm

*An elegant evening in the garden
Details to follow*