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Spring 2010

## SFA Gardens Newsletter, Spring 2010

SFA Gardens, Stephen F. Austin State University

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SFA Mast Arboretum \* Ruby M Mize Azalea Garden \* Pineywoods Native Plant Center

# SFA Gardens News

## Notes from the Director By David Creech

The last few months at SFA Gardens have been a blur of people, plants, and plans actually coming together. Of course, there's the weather to worry about. We've gone from cold and wet to warm and dry - and it's the dry that finds us scrambling to get irrigation going. Good grief, summer hasn't even arrived and we're already worrying about newly planted plants turning to toast! After a bit of grumbling, Greg Grant and Barbara Stump are now making the Tucker house at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center their office. In spite of what they might say, this move was not for me to provide them with the over-their-shoulder attention I think they need! The Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden had a late-by-two-weeks start this spring, but it ended up being absolutely glorious with more visitors and tours than ever before. Thanks to Duke Pittman and his crew, the maintenance has never been better. With Dawn as the captain of an army of volunteers and students, the Spring Garden Gala Day plant sale broke our all-time record, proving once again that plant lovers know how to ignore a recession. The green roof pavilion at the north edge of the Pineywoods Native Plant Center is finished! No, this is not our idea of Stonehenge;



it's actually a research platform: a 16' X 16' roof planted to a wide range of native herbaceous plants and grasses. Which, by the way, was finished just in time to serve as the venue for the wedding of our PNPC research associate Trey Anderson to Christina Keim. We've added another special feature at the very north end of the PNPC property along Austin Street. There's a brand new 60' diameter circle of wailing, weeping Druid-like bald cypress. The variety 'Cascade Falls' is a remarkable find of our native tree that was originally discovered in Cedar Lodge Nursery in New Zealand. Former student and nurseryman Doug Arnold at TreesUSA made a great donation to our program with 150 of them delivered via semi-truck.

Finally, we're excited that SFA's administration and the Board of Regents cut the ribbon on the SFA Recreational Trails and Gardens opening the door for years of garden excitement.

It seems like every time I turn around we're stumbling over people, kids and critters.

Elyce Rodewald is the pied piper for our Environmental Education program which now serves over 12,000 children per year. Her efforts connect our youngest citizens with nature and gardening.

In the adult world, I never cease to be

amazed at who's finding their way into our garden. I am often encountered by visitors along our trails with the question "Do you work here?" I usually respond, "Why, yes, I'm in charge of plumbing. . . can I help you?" I have met some of



the nicest people in the world that way, folks thrilled by the glory of our garden. It's not just the casual visitor or tour bus participant that charges our batteries; it's the crowd of horticulturists, foresters, and botanists that make their way to our garden world for study and cooperation. In February, we enjoyed the visit of four Chinese delegates from Nanjing Forestry University, part of a cooperative project with that major University in China. In April, our guest speaker at the Les Reeves Lecture Series was Mark Krautmann of Heritage Seedlings who graciously flew in all the way from Portland, Oregon. In the same week, we were blessed with the visit of Dr. Kirkbride of the National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. as part of a cooperative project on fringe tree genetic diversity (see accompanying article on this cooperative project). As any gardener knows, it's easy to get down and blue in a garden. There are weeds, insects and diseases. The weather is never quite right. Plants just up and die. However, let's not forget that when the light is right and the rains do come, there's no place more cheerful than the garden. With that in mind, let's keep planting!

# Living Life on the Fringe

By David Creech

Dr. Joseph Kirkbride, taxonomist at the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. visited in mid-April for four days as part of a unique study of *Chionanthus virginicus*, the fringe tree or as known more commonly here, the Grancy Gray Beard. The objective of his visit to the Pineywoods was to collect growing shoot tips of about fifty trees in the wild in an East Texas location, put them on ice, and overnight express them to the USDA station in Poplarville, Mississippi for DNA analysis. The project includes two populations in Maryland, one in South Carolina and one in Texas, the latter representing the western most range of the species. The goal of this study is to understand the genetic diversity of the species and determine opportunities for improvement through breeding. His visit was timed for peak flowering of *Chionanthus virginicus* and, coincidentally, with *Chionanthus pygmaea*, a rare ecotype from Florida, known for its dwarf stature and large olive-like fruit. The fact that we had a sole tree of the latter in the Mast Arboretum, and a nice collection of seedlings from

the tree (presumably crosses with a nearby American fringe tree) only added value to his visit.



Dr. Joseph Kirkbride admiring our Chinese fringe trees on Wilson Drive

To put some icing on the cake, Joe was able to bask in the glory of our amazing line of seventy-five Chinese fringe trees along Wilson drive, all in magnificent bloom during his visit and he was able to collect growing tips from two other Chinese fringe

tree clones we have in the garden. While the Chinese and American fringe trees are not reported to cross, this study may open

up ways to combine genes in the future, all in an attempt by the National Arboretum to find and develop better ornamental plants for the future. As a final bookmark to this story, I learned of the existence of *Chionanthus pubescens*, a rare in the USA pink-flowering fringe tree from the mountains of Ecuador that had found its way into North Carolina. A few emails later, a wonderful surprise box showed up on our doorstep with a five foot healthy tree inside. Thanks go out to Dr. Tom Ranney of the NC Mountain Experiment Station in Asheville, North Carolina. Of course, the fact that the tree likes

cool summer temperatures and can't tolerate freezing is enough to give me pause, but at least it's here and we're proud it's looking pretty happy in its Pineywoods home. Now, if only Dawn and I can remember to pull it into the greenhouse before those first frosts hit in the fall!

## What's the Buzz?

By Elyce Rodewald

The inhabitants of the Winn Day Honeybee Observation Hive at the SFA Mast Arboretum are a marvel to watch. On any given day, the workers are feeding larva, cleaning the hive, caring for the queen, making wax, protecting the hive, and, of course, bringing nectar and pollen to the hive. As the field bees reenter the hive, they rapidly wag their abdomens and perform graceful figure eights to tell the other bees the location of nectar-rich flowers in the arboretum. The queen lays eggs and lays eggs...and then lays more eggs...up to two thousand in one day! The honeybees go about their business behind a Plexiglas window, seemingly unaware that large human eyes are watching their endless activity.

Recently, the queen in the observation hive felt a bit overcrowded, so she left the hive with a number of her daughters to start a new hive. We didn't see her leave, but she was in the hive in the morning, and nowhere to be found after lunch. Not to worry. The worker bees promptly set to work building queen cells for the soon-to-hatch royal larva. The queen cells are much larger than the cells made for worker larva, and the queen larva is fed royal jelly so that she develops into a fertile female (i.e. the next queen bee). As the newsletter goes to press, we are anxiously awaiting the hatching of the new queen.

Stay tuned for royal updates...or better yet, stop by the Arboretum and visit the observation hive to get up close and personal with these incredible insects!



Cecil Hunt and Bob Ham, members of the Pineywoods Beekeeper Association, maintain the observation hive.

**Special Thanks!** - We extend our grateful appreciation to the members of the Pineywoods Beekeeper Association who diligently care for the Winn Day Honeybee Observation throughout the year. The beekeepers also generously (and cheerfully!) donate their time during the annual Bugs, Bees, Butterflies and Blossoms festival and share their incredible knowledge of bees and beekeeping with over 2300 children and adults.



# Gardening With the Tired and Lowly

By Greg Grant



Hippies, organic gardeners, and new age environmentalists would like to think they invented recycling, but they didn't. Cottage gardeners, country folks, and those on the low end of the economic scale have always recycled. Since my Grandmother Emanis starting taking me to the country dump grounds on the hidden little dirt roads of East Texas, I've had a fascination with re-using discarded objects. One man's trash truly is another man's treasure. As crude as it sounds, it really wasn't that much different from my current hobby of cruising junk shops and antique dealers. The display and customer service have come a long way however.

I also have an acute interest in low budget gardens. It's not because I object to spending money on the garden. That's where all my money goes! It's because I find constant inspiration in the gardens of people that have no money to spend on their true love but express their love nonetheless. Obviously, it doesn't take money to create a wonderful garden. Some of the prettiest landscapes I've ever witnessed belonged to poor inner city residents and lowly country gardeners.

While modern gardeners spend their cash on gazing globes, bronze statues, and Italian terra cotta pots, these recycling pioneers make use of a myriad of "pre-owned" goods including dishpans, leaky buckets, and tire planters for containers. That's right,

tire planters. Tires that used to go under the family sedan make excellent containers for plants to grow in. First of all, they don't crack or decay. You can bump them with the lawn mower or the Toyota and they remain unscathed. Early in my horticultural career I would have thought it ludicrous to have a sixteen-inch drainage hole in the bottom of a pot. But this big hole where the wheel used to be provides open access to the soil below during times of severe drought. "Severe drought" in a pot occurs about twice a day during Texas summers! And of course landfills or storage lots full of old tires aren't the best or safest use of space. Have you ever seen the perpetual tire fire on an episode of *The Simpsons*?

I'll admit that tires aren't the prettiest pot to ever grace the patio. The "tired old look" just needs an extreme makeover. Historically, most garden worthy tires have been turned into "crown tire" planters, named such due to their similarity to a king's crown (or Jug Head's cap!). To make a crown tire planter, one side-wall needs to be cut out in a zigzag fashion between the inner ring and the tread that meets the pavement. There are no steel belts in this relatively thin side-wall. It does require a strong handled, sharp butcher knife and a little muscle. It's not as hard as one might think. Once this inner ring has been cut out, you'll have a potential piece of "sun art" sculpture. All you have to do is paint it golden-yellow and hang it on the garden shed. Latex paint seems to weather best on tire art.

Cutting the tire planter is the easy part. Flipping it inside out is harder. This gives the points of the crown their typical reflexed look and also increases the soil capacity somewhat. Use your foot or knee to invert one small section of the tire, then gradually work your way around both sides of the tire until it's completely turned inside out. The last portion is the hardest. Stomp-

ing it at this stage usually does the trick. Make sure your neighbors aren't watching because you'll look like a sweaty chimp at the zoo as you're completing it!

Traditionally, many crown tire planters were painted white but I've seen many assorted hues in my travels. I've even seen faux finishes painted to resemble copper and other upscale materials. Two coats of paint will normally last for years. The



crown edges don't have to be pointed either. I've seen scallops and even hearts cut into the borders.

Fill the "new" container with a professional grade, peat based potting mix along with a slow release fertilizer and grow any typical container plants. I've produced everything from Irish potatoes and herbs to annuals and perennials in them. It gives you a sense of environmental accomplishment and the neighbors a topic of conversation they'll never tire of!

Mark your calendars!

Greg will be telling the Hole Truth About Woodpeckers at the 2010 Bluebird Symposium in Henderson on August 14. In addition, Kirk Kridler will be speaking on the How, Why and What of Eastern Bluebirds.

Greg would be happy to send you the registration form.

Contact him at [ggrantgardens@yahoo.com](mailto:ggrantgardens@yahoo.com)



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"Bluebirds Across Texas . . .  
one nestbox at a time"



"Bluebirds Across Texas . . .  
one nestbox at a time"

# Alpha and Omega in the Azalea Garden

By Barb Stump

This report from the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden will highlight blooms from the beginning of the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail (March 13-April 3) to some blooming after “the season” was over. First, let me say that this year’s blooms were the best they have ever been and the bloom season was our longest yet. Because of the late cool season we had fabulous camellias for the “Passion for Camellias” Azalea Trail Symposium March 13. The cool weather also held the various “waves” of azalea blooms longer on the shrubs than normal. This was especially true for the “purple spider azaleas” along University Drive. We estimate that our bloom schedule was delayed 3 to 4 weeks. So, our Kurumes (such as ‘Coral Bells’ and ‘Hinodegiri’) didn’t bloom until the first two weeks of April, at the same time as our deciduous azaleas. Talk about an unusual season. Our Southern Indians (such as ‘Salmon Solomon’ and ‘Red Formosa’) were blooming during Garden Gala day, April 17. The Satsuki are actually blooming now in early May, the month in which they typically bloom in



*Camellia japonica* ‘Jacks’

Japan. Our season is ending with our masses of Robin Hill hybrids along with one lovely white deciduous azalea,

‘Coleman’s May Pink’. Some of our true elepidote rhododendrons are taking hold and bloomed up until the end of April. We plan to get more!

Now for my alpha and omega plants: From March 2 through April 29 the Azalea Garden docents and I gave 27 guided tours for the

Azalea Trail to nearly 700 people, including two master gardener groups that toured all SFA Gardens. The early tours focused on the very early blooming deciduous magnolias and the spring leaf colors of the Japanese maples; the star of the early azalea show was ‘Geisha’ that lit up the northern entrance of the garden



*Rhododendron* ‘Sunglow’

for nearly 3 weeks. This hybrid azalea has every combination of white and purple streaks, specks, and rose-purple sports on a shrub about 6 feet tall. While this variability in color is similar to that of the Japanese Satsuki azaleas, ‘Geisha’ is actually a Glenn Dale hybrid bred by researcher B. Y. Morrison at the USDA Plant Introduction Station at Glenn Dale, Maryland. Our camellias were spectacular for the symposium, with nearly 30 in bloom. The most spectacular were bright rose-pink ‘Anticipation’ and deep-red ‘Royal Intrigue’, but the longest-lasting has been *Camellia japonica* ‘Jacks’.

This lovely pink is still blooming into the first week of May. My Omega for this season is ‘Sunglow’, one of my favorites, a CARLA hybrid developed by Dr. R.J. Stadtherr and H. M. Singletary at North Carolina State University. This stunning bloom is aptly named, as it is a very bright, glowing rose-red. It makes a great background plant as it grows nearly 5 feet tall and is visible from a long distance. ‘Sunglow’ was one of the azaleas propagated for the Garden Gala, and was it ever popular!

# Ribbon Cutting for SFA Recreational Trail and Gardens

By David Creech



SFA’s administration and the Board of Regents made a brief stop on April 19, 2010 along University Drive for a ribbon cutting for SFA’s latest green resource. The sixty-eight acre SFA Recreational Trails and Gardens, known for years as Hunt Woods, is now a special place on our

campus. In August 2008, a proposal to the Texas Parks and Wildlife, authored by Dr. Mike Legg, SFA College of Forestry and Agriculture (COFA) and Michael Maningas, Department of Campus Recreation, was awarded \$104,700. For over two years, the trail project committee has been working to create what we think is a very special resource for the university and community. The committee consisted of Michael Maningas, Dr. David Creech, (COFA), Dr. Pat Stephens-Williams (COFA), Elyce Rodewald (COFA), Barbara Stump (COFA), and Dr. Michael Legg. In essence, the project is a collaboration of the College of Forestry and Agriculture, SFA Gardens and

the Department of Campus Recreation. At this writing, the following has been accomplished. Over 1.25 miles of ADA compliant asphalt multi-use trails and 4 miles of single track mountain biking trails make the forest accessible to the public. There’s split rail cedar fencing and ‘Koromo Shikibu’ azaleas mirroring the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden planting along University Drive. Fifty-three benches have been built and placed with the assistance of Eagle Scout candidate, Kip Tindell. There is also over 6500 sq.ft. of parking area serving the property. Most important, over 1000 hours of volunteer work from community and university groups has been utilized in construction of the trails. As for the future, there are plans for picnic tables and entrance kiosks. Until then, SFA Gardens can “Keep on planting!”



# Nacogdoches Naturally - TPWD Co-op Grant

By Kerry Lemon

## 2009/2010 After School Outdoor Adventures

The After School Program of Nacogdoches Naturally will be celebrating a successful year with an Outdoor Olympics and home-made ice cream party at their final event on Wednesday, May 12. The late winter/spring season has been filled with numerous outdoor skill adventures for the kids including rock climbing on the Outdoor Pursuits indoor climbing wall, bird watching with volunteers from the local Audubon Society, archery training provided by Dawn Bello from TPWD, angler education training, and a day of canoeing.

The students also contributed their time to service projects here at the Native Plant Center. While planting long leaf pines in the marsh, they learned about the history of long leaf pines in East Texas as well as the unique relationship of fire to the pines. After learning about pollinators in January they helped the staff plant a pollinator garden at the entrance to the Center in early March. Now that the days are warming up, it is beginning to burst with color. Be sure to check it out!



*Planting a pollinator garden at the entrance to the Pineywoods Native Plant Center*

In addition, the kids participated in an afternoon clean-up at the Maroney Community Playground Park and Trail. For many of them this was their first visit to this park. Of course, at break time there was a chance for swinging, climbing, sliding, etc. It was a good opportunity for them to give back to their community as well as visit a local park. It was apparent to all of us that the two worst trash problems were from straw wrappers from disposable juice boxes and cigarette butts.



*Cleaning up and having fun at Maroney Park*

Clearly, these children feel a deep connection to the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center. While walking through the woods, you may find a tree with the name of a child posted on it. These trees were adopted by the kids in late winter and they have watched them change with the seasons. Hopefully, they will return with their families over the years to observe the always changing process of nature. We are grateful to have had this time to expose these children to new outdoor skills and share the wonders of the natural world with them.

## Family Weekend Outdoor Adventures

Fun, fun, and more fun!! The family program of Nacogdoches Naturally has had a great time the past several months. We



*Canoeing with the family at Martin Dies State Park*

began with the Fishing Day at Lakeside Park where we joined the Nacogdoches Parks and Recreation Department on this blustery cold January day to promote fishing and demonstrate outdoor cooking. Our vans were full in February and March for 3 great field trips to Mission Tejas State Park, Caney Creek Recreational Area, and Martin Dies State Park. On these outings families enjoyed Dutch oven cooking, picnicking, fishing, hiking, and a bit of canoeing. Our last great activity was the big Earth Day event combined with the SFA Mast Arboretum plant sale. Nacogdoches Naturally had a booth with information about family camping as well as opportunities to set-up tents and roast marshmallows. We were pleased to have some of our after school kids come out for the day even participating in the Recycled Art Contest. We also saw many familiar faces from our previous family outdoor adventures.

Coming up we have a family camping weekend at Tyler State Park on May 22-23, and our final big bash on July 10 at Lake Nacogdoches. We are gratified to have taken so many families outside to play and learn and are especially thankful for all the new friends we have made over the past year.

## Last chance to register for the Lone Star Regional Native Plant Conference, June 2-5

Early registration prices extended - visit <http://arboretum.sfasu.edu> for conference details and registration form, or contact Dawn Stover at 936-468-4404 for more info!

You are cordially invited to a "Cutting Picnic" on June 19, 2010 hosted by the Texas Chapter of the Azalea Society of America. Learn how to propagate azaleas!

Contact Barb Stump for details: 936-468-1729 or [bstump@sfasu.edu](mailto:bstump@sfasu.edu)



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## Can we kill it? I think not!

By Dawn Stover

When we had the trails paved in the Arboretum a few years back, there was a weird area created by the switchback at the Children's Garden. A big pile of red, brick-hard sand, no grass and no irrigation. Sometimes construction projects provide opportunity to make up some of that proverbial lemonade. We did just that and now have a test plot that my students lovingly refer to as the "See if it can live" bed. I've had troubles keeping more drought tolerant perennials in the borders due to rich soils and regular irrigation, so I thought it might be fun to try them in leaner conditions - those more like their native habitats. Of course yucca and agaves are perfectly at home, but what about things we typically melt out in our humidity? *Agastache*, *Penstemon*, *Salvia* and such. Well, there are some definite winners and some clear losers. The *Agastache* and

*Penstemon* did well for a while, but they seemed to really want a drink or two late in the summer. I've had really good luck with blue flax, rain lilies, autumn sage, false indigo, nierembergia, heliotrope, sundrops and so far this year with bluebeard



*Centaurea cineraria* 'Colchester White', velvet centaruea, blooming near the Kingham Children's Garden Pavilion

(*Caryopteris*). The shining star by far though is our velvet centaurea (*Centaurea cineraria* 'Colchester White'). This perennial bachelor button boasts thick silvery foliage, and while initially beautiful will die a slow, ugly, melting death under good care and cultivation. Give this critter a little neglect and abuse and it will sing and bloom it's pretty little heart out. In poor soil and no supplemental irrigation, plants stay compact with a nice rounded habit and bloom heavily in late spring. Purple flowers resemble a cross between cornflower and thistle and are good nectar sources as well as good cut flowers. When plants are small, they resemble dusty miller. Make no mistake - these beauties are hands down a better, longer-lived alternative. And by the way - they made it through this last, very cold winter with nary a blink.

I'd say this plant is a real winner. Wouldn't you?