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Spring 2011

## SFA Gardens Newsletter, Spring 2011

SFA Gardens, Stephen F. Austin State University

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# SFA Gardens *News*

## Notes From the Director

By Dr. David Creech

I swore I wasn't going to start this column ranting about the weather but I just can't help it. I guess it's a farmer thing – I've got way too many years dealing with food, fiber and flowers, and worrying about the weather.

Yes, it's dry. With 30" rainfall in 2010 - almost

20" below normal – I didn't think it could get much worse. But

here we are in early April 2011 with the situation once again approaching dire – and this is supposed to be the rainy season! Even a tiny rain – we got a ½ inch the other day - is now cause for song and dance. Still, I wonder if we're turning into West Texas? Hotter and drier with more severe weather events? Nacogdoches as beach front property?

In the Spring 2011 issue of Spirit magazine, Texas A and M University's Professor John Nielsen-Gammon, a climate expert, predicted temperatures will be rising .5 to .8 degrees Fahrenheit per decade from now until 2060, and he remarked that "the unusually warm summers in parts of Texas in 2009 and 2010 were a taste of the future." The only thing that might stop this would be some kind of major volcanic eruption or major

solar decline in output. That doesn't sound like much of a cure to me. He goes on to say that rising temperatures will inevitably lead to other problems including "water shortages, increased farm and ranch irrigation, crop failures, and long, severe droughts." He concluded his interview by recom-



mending we may as well get used to it and deal with it.

There's some solace in the fact that we're not the first batch of humans to find ourselves at war with climate. I am reminded of a much-quoted line in *The Essential Earthman* by Henry Mitchell, "It is not nice to garden anywhere . . . everywhere there are violent winds, startling once-per-five-century floods, unprecedented droughts, record setting freezes, abusive and blasting heats never known before. There is no place, no garden where these terrible things do not drive gardeners mad." Hey, that sounds like us! Get used to it and react. In the

botanical garden community there's a consensus that climate change is happening, that the trend is to warmer, and we need to be evaluating plants for their ability to deal with it – and many gardens are leaning to evaluating plants we can eat. We are part of that. SFA Gardens citrus trials are underway.

We've got some very cool Kiwis under test and visible from Starr Avenue. We are adding to our fig collection and will be planting it once we have drip irrigation in place. Trey is managing a fine collection of muscadine grapes at the PNPC, and, of course, our blueberry connections are solid. New to SFA Gardens, we are proud to announce a new sustainable fruit and vegetable garden under construction on

the east side of the Intramural field. Dr. Jeff Adkins and Dawn have carved out a big patch of the intramural field that will soon be part of a large vegetable growing project. Finally, in our preparations for the century ahead, I've secretly planted a bunch of *Elaeagnus multiflora*, Goomi berry, in the garden. Dawn and I continue to debate the fate of our raisin tree.

More visitors are visiting SFA Gardens than ever before. I knew we had arrived when last Saturday I found the place crawling with humans, with both the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden and the Mast Arboretum parking lots brimming over,

*Notes continued on p. 3*

## Nacogdoches Naturally: How Time Flies When You're Having Fun! By Kerry Lemon



**“We keep ourselves busy having way too much fun.”**

Can it be glorious spring again already? Nacogdoches Naturally can be found outside enjoying the gardens at the Arboretum and roaming the trails at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center. Thanks to generous support from the Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture, we are able to continue providing outdoor learning opportunities for children from the Nacogdoches Boys and Girls Club as well as weekend family outdoor events for the community at large.

**The Nacogdoches Naturally After School program** has expanded to include vegetable gardening and food education. The goal of the gardening project is to introduce these children to basic gardening practices and locally grown foods increasing their understanding of where and how food is grown and encouraging healthy eating selections in their daily diets. Dawn generously allocated a garden plot approximately 10' by 20' for the project.

We began in October by planting a variety of cool season crops such as kale, broccoli, spinach, lettuce, cabbage, carrots, and strawberries. Inspired by a field trip to the Appleby Community Farm (a local CSA run by Brian and Cindy Pruett), the children

participated in planting, cultivating and harvesting in the new garden. It is quite heartening to see these kids voraciously eating fresh raw vegetables straight from the ground – not an everyday sight in our fast food culture. With assistance from Dawn and Greg, the group planted salad bowl samplers as a take-home project and propagated warm season veggies. This week we began cleaning up the garden and putting our spring plants in the ground. A garden feast is planned for mid-May so the children can enjoy the bounty of their gardening efforts.

In addition to gardening, the children have experienced a variety of other outdoor educational and recreational adventures including a visit to the SFA Beef Center, fishing, hiking, and tree identification. In April, an SFA Art Department graduate student will facilitate an art and nature collaboration project with the students. The spring session promises to be packed full with new and unique experiences connecting with the natural world.

**The Family Outdoor Adventure program** began the year with a camping trip to Tyler State Park in partnership with the Texas Outdoor Family program. With the help of park staff, 15 fish habitats were placed in strategic loca-

tions in the lake at the park. At the Fall Farm Day event in November, we partnered with students from the SFA Agriculture Department. Sixty plus people (with about 45 of those being children) came out to the SFA Beef Center and were treated to a great day of farm animal petting, hayrides, outdoor cooking, and more. In January we joined with the Nacogdoches Parks and Recreation Department on a cold, beautiful day for the annual Kid Fish at Lakeside Park. Nacogdoches Naturally offered Junior Angler Certification and demonstrated Dutch oven cooking. Next on the schedule was the collaborative effort with Dawn, Gardening 101 for the whole family. At this workshop, the adults learned about home gardening from Dawn while the kids played with worms and had a veggie/fruit taste party. Later we joined up and families planted salad bowl samplers and other warm season veggies to be planted in their spring gardens.

Whew! We keep ourselves busy having way too much fun. The spring and summer schedule is equally filled with exciting outdoor opportunities for the family.

You all are invited to join us at one of our upcoming events!



## Growing Minds at the SFA Gardens By Elyce Rodewald

If you frequent the SFA Gardens, you may have noticed the azaleas in full bloom, the dogwoods showing off or the passion vine starting to sprout. Have you also noticed more children in the gardens this spring? Our education programs are in full swing, starting in March with Forest Awareness Tours hosted at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center by the Texas Forest Service. Fifth graders from all over Nacogdoches County visited with foresters, wildlife biologists, soil scientists, and our own SFA Garden volunteers to learn more about tree growth, forest products, the nitrogen cycles, East Texas

soils, water quality, insects, and forest management techniques. Fourth graders from Nacogdoches ISD have also been “Wild About Science” as they learn about bioassays, measuring trees, collecting data, and the earth’s rotation around the sun. Third graders will be exploring East Texas ecosystems, and second graders will soon be going on an Arboretum Adventure.

At SFA Gardens, we are lucky to have a dedicated and enthusiastic group of volunteers who present these educational pro-

grams. We are also extremely fortunate to have the beautiful gardens as our outdoor classroom. A very special thanks to the staff, students, and volunteers who have created this exceptional learning environment!



## Nacogdoches Naturally Spring Schedule

**April 30, 2011**

**9 am until 12 pm**

Farm and Forest Day (free)

SFA Beef Center, Highway 259

**May 14, 2011**

**9 am until 2 pm**

Lake Sam Rayburn Nature Center (\$10 per family)

Lake Sam Rayburn/Caney Creek Recreation Area



**June 2011**

SFA Pineywoods Summer Camps

Fees and dates vary depending on age group

Children ages 4-15

SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center or Mill Creek Gardens

Visit: <http://pnpc.sfasu.edu> for camp brochures and registration packets

For more information or to register call Kerry Lemon 936-468-5586

### Notes, con't.

cameras snapping pics at every turn, and a cheerful picnic or two in progress.

The Gayla Mize Garden is up and running at breakneck speed. Ray Mize is eager to see it happen yesterday. I told him that it takes one hundred years to build a garden, two hundred if you don't intend to rush it. . . but he didn't buy it. We've got a new mountain of mulch to work with and our irrigation system is up to the task of keeping about 500 plants in good health. Barb and I are still working on the mission of this new garden – and folks are asking how is it going to be different from the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, a garden that is about 90% evergreen exotic azaleas, many commonly found in the gardens of the South, and the other 10% being our very own native deciduous azaleas and their hybrids. We will be reversing that mix in the Gayla Mize Garden. That is, the Gayla Mize Garden will showcase the range of native de-

ciduous azalea diversity available in the industry today. Certainly less well known or understood, the native deciduous azaleas and their hybrids offer plenty of excitement. Our Texas native, *Rhododendron canescens*, will be well represented with varieties and seedlings to exploit flower color diversity . . . from white to pink and lavender. Also the yellows and oranges of *R. flammeum*, *R. austrinum* and hybrids using those as a genetic foundation. The end result is a shout-a-joyful-noise-unto-the-Lord experience. Deciduous azaleas are very well adapted to this bottomland site. With a little smart horticulture, they will thrive in this environment. As they get older and bigger, they will become more dramatic, and in my opinion, the perfect tribute to Gayla Mize and her love for Nacogdoches as a special garden spot in the South. We're here to make that happen.

Finally, we are ready to seek a contract for the architectural and construction drawings for the Conservation Education Center. With about a third of our 1.5 million dollar campaign pledged, and several exciting opportunities on our table, the Friends of the SFA Gardens Board of Advisors is ready for drawings. This is not a build it and they will come project. The kids are already here, over ten thousand being educated, entertained, and enlightened in the past year. While the environmental education program of SFA Gardens is already top notch, the Conservation Education Center will take the program to a new level – and, in my opinion, to regional and national attention – and help thousands of kids connect with science, nature, and gardening. Until next time, let's keep planting.









Each year, over 17,000 people participate in education programs at the SFA Gardens. School children, SFA students, pre-service and in-service teachers, gardeners, families, and community members learn in our beautiful outdoor classrooms on field trips, at professional development workshops, in seminars, university classes, after-school programs, and family fun days. As much as we love to be a part of nature, on many occasions, mother nature and inclement weather have caused us to reschedule or cancel events.

With this in mind, we have developed a plan to build a world-class Conservation Education Center (CEC) at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center that will include two structures: an open-air green-roof pavilion and an enclosed building containing flexible laboratory/classroom space, including public restrooms. Both structures will be very advanced in their energy-efficient design and will be, by example, an integral part of the environmental education program. We envision buildings that are integrated into the landscape rather than imposed upon it. We plan for the beauty of the natural surroundings to be incorporated into—and visible from—the structures so that even in inclement weather our visitors are still surrounded by nature.

The cost of the project is estimated to be \$1.5 million. To date, generous community members have donated or pledged over \$550,000 to the construction of the Conservation Education Center. Please join us in raising the roof for this special facility that will benefit the entire Nacogdoches community.

For more information, or to make contributions, please contact Jill Still, SFASU Foundation, Inc., PO Box 6092-SFA, Nacogdoches, TX 75962, 936-468-5406, [jstill@sfasu.edu](mailto:jstill@sfasu.edu).

## China Roses

By Greg Grant

Most people would think of porcelain upon hearing of a China rose, but the informed gardener should think of perpetual beauty on a tough-as-nails plant. Many rosarians don't realize it, but the China rose (*Rosa chinensis*) is the parent of all of our modern roses.

Brought out of China in the 1700s, the China rose was entirely different from any rose known at that time. Its most amazing aspect was its ability to repeat-bloom, over and over again. You must realize, at the time, there were no ever-blooming roses in the West. It seems that China had them nearly a thousand years in advance.

In addition to its constancy of bloom, the China rose also possessed other unique characteristics, including pointed buds, purplish-red new growth, and blossoms that actually grew darker with age, as opposed to fading in bright light as existing roses did.

The original wild China rose (*Rosa chinensis spontanea*) apparently was not discovered in China until 1885. This was a climbing, single-flowered, once-blooming red rose. Either through sporting or hybridization through the ages, it eventually gave rise to dwarf ever-blooming shrubs.

It is now assumed that the original China roses were hybrids between the China rose (*R. chinensis*) and the tea rose (*R. odorata*). The two "original" China roses in Europe were 'Slater's Crimson China', the first true red rose, and 'Parson's Pink China', also known as 'Old Blush' because of its darkening petal color.

'Slater's Crimson China' is the original parent of all modern red roses. 'Old Blush' is apparently the parent of the Portland, bourbon, and noisette classes and possibly others. The China rose is also the direct parent of tea, polyantha, and miniature roses. What a lineage!



*Rosa chinensis* 'Louis Philippe'

In quite a testimony to their survivability and duration, 'Old Blush' and other China roses are among the most common vernacular garden roses found throughout the South. That's simply amazing for roses depicted in Chinese silk screen paintings 1,000 years ago.

It's a shame to think of all that the China rose has contributed to our modern roses, then to realize that it is now largely

forgotten and neglected by the modern rose world as a useless relic of rose history. Part of the reason for the obscurity of the China rose is the fact that it is somewhat cold tender and normally freezes above the Mason-Dixon line. Therefore, you seldom see China roses extolled in any garden literature from the North, where unfortunately much of it originates. Modern shrub roses were developed for the North. The China rose belongs to the South.

In fact, of all the roses existing today, I rank China roses number one for landscaping purposes. China roses prefer full sun and good drainage. They also benefit from the incorporation of organic material into the soil, mulching, deep infrequent watering, and a spring application of fertilizer. As they bloom on all new growth, China roses love an occasional shearing with the hedge clippers but never heavy pruning as with hybrid teas.

Also, remember that China roses are twiggly shrubs, not producers of cut flowers and only possess a mild fragrance. In addition they can suffer from occasional bouts of powdery mildew during the winter and spring and from mild rounds of black spot during the summer. They however do not require any spraying to revive them.

Some of the China roses that perform well in the South include 'Ducher', 'Old Blush', 'Cramoisi Superieur', 'Louis Philippe', 'Martha Gonzales', 'Archduke Charles', and 'Mutabilis'. In all honesty, I haven't seen a true China rose that hasn't performed well in the South. In this case, an antique "made in China" is better.



**Special Thanks**  
to  
**Mrs. Virginia Winston**  
for our new Kubota RTV

**This generous gift allows for transportation of guests throughout the gardens as well as more hauling and towing capabilities.**



## Wild About Wild Azaleas!

By Barb Stump

Our annual feast of color is still in full swing in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. With over 500 different varieties or species of evergreen and deciduous azaleas, we have an exceptionally long season, typically from mid-February into mid-May. Only one of May-blooming Satsuki azaleas has begun blooming, and there are Robin Hills and Harris hybrids yet to come this season.

But the big focus this year was to make people as wild about “wild azaleas” as we are. Our March 12<sup>th</sup> Symposium title was supposed to do this, but I guess calling the event “Wonders of Deciduous Azaleas” when there were very few blooms was a little obscure. Many people told me that I should have called them “wild azaleas” and we would have had people flocking in.

This is somewhat akin to using the Southern common name “tulip tree” for deciduous magnolias. Everyone knows these lovely ornamental trees with tulip-shaped flowers that are easy to see on bare branches. The name is very descriptive, certainly. Our crop of white, rose, and yellow “magnolia tulips” bloomed in early March and gave early garden visitors a

wonderful show. It’s still hard for me to call them tulip trees, since I grew up in the North and East Coast where the “tulip tree” is called the tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). I am delighted to say both kinds of “tulip trees” grow very well here.



*Rhododendron austrinum*

But I digress. The “wild azaleas” that people here remember from walks in the woods or visits to the “Azalea Canyons” in

Jasper are species azaleas that are deciduous. Native to Texas are the pale pink *Rhododendron canescens* and the white *R. viscosum*. Native to the Gulf Coast is the yellow *R. austrinum*. All these species grow well in our heat and humidity. So breeders in the South have used their pollen to create new azalea cultivars and have selected from wild-grown plants, all with the aim of producing large fragrant flowers. The true glory is the very yellow range of colors that comes from this breeding with *R. austrinum*. The late Dr. Eugene Aromi and others have worked with the true native material and crossed it with a variety of other species azaleas to create large-flowered fragrant “nativars” like the very golden yellow ‘Aromi Sunrise’ and the big white-and-yellow ‘High Tide’. Pink is still popular in these wild azaleas, and is very handsome in ‘Phlox Pink’ and in ‘Cherub’s Blush’. This has been a wonderful year for our deciduous azaleas. Even though the branches are bare in the winter, these woody shrubs bear wonderful flowers as the branches just begin to leaf out. They mix in with evergreen azaleas and add a touch of height (up to 12 feet ) that can be a big accent for the back of the border.



Magic abounded in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden on March 26<sup>th</sup> as princesses, fairies, and butterflies gathered in the garden for our annual tea party. Guests had the opportunity to visit with live butterflies and rabbits before dancing through the azaleas. Each princess made a special wish as she cast rose petals into Lanana Creek from the bridge. Special thanks to sponsors Boyette Consulting, Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, and to volunteers Chelsea Peterson and Nancy Snoberger.



## Sorting Out the Magnolias

By David Creech

SFA Gardens is home to a fine collection of Magnolias, many rarely encountered in botanical gardens or private collections. Unfortunately, for too many years, we've had "nomenclature" issues. That is, for one reason or another, plants we have accessioned just ain't what we thought they were.



Adding to the confusion, Magnolias have recently seen a number of taxonomic name changes. For example, Michelias, which bloom on lateral buds, have now been lumped in with Magnolias. As I was

sauntering through the Mast Arboretum last week, I found one of our young trees in bloom. This plant had come from a seed lot through Professor Yin Yunlong, my friend and colleague at the Nanjing Botanical Garden. He had noted that he had "mixed the seed of six species to simplify the paperwork." Great. After some head scratching and email attaching some images, I discovered two things. One, this new bloom is actually *Magnolia foveolata*, and is very similar to the variety 'Shibimachi' introduced by Barry Yinger. *M. foveolata* is unique in that it doesn't bloom early, flowers opening here around the first of April. Besides a show stopping fragrant bloom, one of the most striking features of this

species is the shimmering golden indumentums (pubescence) on new buds and young unfolding leaves. Richard Figlar, the consummate authority in the Magnolia Society, was enthusiastic about our plant. He noted that plants of *M. foveolata* originating from the SW parts of its range in the Yunnan and NW Vietnam are generally less cold hardy. In fact, *M. foveolata* collected from the Sapa region of N Vietnam died to the ground when temperatures dipped to 20°F. Our particular specimen tree easily survived 11°F this year and about that low in January of 2010. That's great news. Now, let's see if we get some seed!