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SFA Gardens Newsletter, Spring 2013

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SFA Gardens *NEWS*

Notes from the Director

By Dave Creech

Brace yourself! There's a construction zone at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center. The Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Center is happening now! For the next nine months, we will be looking out the Tucker House windows at all the excitement. Being so close to the construction site will be handy. We can all be Johnny-on-the-spot to run out and provide advice and wisdom to John Kingham, the construction manager at risk, Jerry Sutton, the architect, SFA's Physical Plant and all the subcontract carpenters, plumbers and electricians. Just joking! This train has left the station, and we're on board. The new facility will welcome more than 12,000 kids and volunteers per year and will serve as the meeting point for garden seminars, lectures and workshops.

If I had to sum up the months since the last newsletter, I'd have to say more plants, more people and more good things happening than we could ever have possibly imagined. The Garden Gala Day plant sale in April was the best in our history with a large crowd making its way through the biggest inventory ever.

Elyce is a humble soul and would never toot her own horn, so I will. As our envi-

ronmental education program coordinator, she is responsible for all our adult and children's programming. We were so proud that she was awarded "Ag Educator of the Year" at the 13th annual Nacogdoches Country Agriculture Appreciation and Awareness Banquet in April. Elyce is one of those rare employees on overdrive. Since her arrival in 2000, she's built an outstanding environmental education program for our littlest citizens in the region. Her mantra is simple: she's here to cure "nature deficit disorder."

The Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden had a stellar season, perhaps the best ever. The parking lots were full, and at times there was shoulder to shoulder traffic on our trails. One Saturday I was snapping a few pictures, pruning a few limbs, and a couple came up to me and asked if I worked here. I said, "Why yes, I do. I'm in charge of irrigation." Well, I learned they were from Oklahoma, visiting friends in Dallas and decided to spend the day and a night. They told me to "let whoever is in charge know that this garden is such a surprise – we had no idea it would be this good! We visit many gardens, and this one is one of the best." Barb tells me we even had a couple from

Scotland who thought this was a fabulous garden, but they also noted that the blooming epidote *Rhododendron* 'Sir Robert Peele' was not as impressive as in their homeland. After they learned of our summer temperatures, they felt it was an "awesome accomplishment" that it was still alive.

In the Gayla Mize Garden, we're proud to announce that our well is alive and well. A new house shelters this amazing resource, and a first test revealed we have 57 gallons per minute to work with! Our pavilion project directly across from the well is still a project under construction. The main central post is in place, and our main challenge is getting eight 22-foot-long cedar beams into place. With more than 1,000 new plants in the garden, Duke Pittman and crew have jumped on laying drip lines, popping in emitters, mulching and keeping weeds at bay. The collections going in here are amazing with more rare and unusual plants than anywhere else in our garden world. Dawn has planted an exciting *Chrysanthemum* trial at the front entrance, and I've been working to build what will one day be one of the best collections of *Cri-*

Notes, cont.

num in the South. Stay tuned.

I traveled to Mexico in early March on an eclectic trip packed with memories and plant learning. My host was Dr. Teobaldo Equiluz, a NCSU-educated forester, who owns several nurseries and a landscape company in Mexico City and has a relationship with the Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo in Texcoco, which is the national school of Agriculture. I was part of a band of Chinese and American horticulturists making a connection over one tree: the Arbole de Tule. That's the Mexican version of our own baldcypress. As this was my second sojourn to the tree, I was once again filled with awe at the base of the "big one" in Oaxaca, which is 200 feet in circumference and 3,000 years old! A new experience for me was standing under 1,000 year-old Montezuma cypresses at Texcoco. This strange grove of monsters served as the wood from which the boats were made to

launch Cortez's attack on the capitol of the Aztecs more than 500 years ago. No doubt massive then, they were then perched on the edge of Lake Texcoco, which was later drained by the Spaniards and is now a salty somewhat barren plain.

I was accompanied by two American friends, Mark Weathington of North Carolina State Uni-



Todd Lasseigne, Dr. Zhuang Yule, Dr. Dave Creech, Dr. Yin Yunlong, Dr. Teobaldo Equiluz, Dr. Mark Weathington, JC Raulston Arboretum and Lu Zhi Guo

versity and Todd Lasseigne of the Tulsa Botanical Garden in Oklahoma. Also in attendance were my long-time friend, Professor Yin Yunlong of the Nanjing Botanical Garden, as well as the director of the Nanjing Botanical Garden, another of their colleagues. We made our way by van to Oaxaca and Xalapa and then back without incident, all marveling at the amazing botany of Mexico along the way. We capped our trip with a day in Mexico City, delivering a seminar to the botany faculty at National Autonomous University of Mexico main campus, the *Ciudad Universitaria* located within the Coyoacán borough in the southern part of Mexico City. With more than 100,000 students, nearly 40 facilities and institutes, a cultural center, an ecological reserve and botanical garden, the central library, and a few museums, this was an amazing experience for all of us and a must stop if you're ever in Mexico City. Until next time, let's keep planting!

A LOOK AT PINEYWOODS CAMP 2013

SFA Gardens' Nacogdoches Naturally program will soon kick off its 12th year of Pineywoods Camp for youth ages 4 to 15. Registration is now open, and there are four weeks of camp sessions serving different age groups.

- **Wonder Woods** for ages 4 to 6 will be held from 8:30 to 11 a.m. June 10-14, at the Jim and Beth Kingham Children's Garden, located at the pavilion on East College Street. Cost for this camp is \$80.
- **Jack Creek Camp** for ages 7 to 11, two separate sessions. Jack Creek Camp 1: June 17-21 and Jack Creek Camp 2: June 24-28. The camps are held from 9 a.m. to noon at the SFA Experimental Forest, 6598 FM 2782. Cost for this week of camp is \$115.
- **Wilderness Adventures** for campers ages 12 to 15 will be collaboration with the SFA Outdoor Pursuits program. The camp will be held July 8-12, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday and Tuesday and from 9 a.m. Wednesday through 4 p.m. Friday (with two nights of camping). Drop-off and pick-up for campers will be at SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center, 2900 Raguet St. Cost for that week is \$250.

For details and camp registration forms, visit <http://sfagardens.sfasu.edu> and click on "Environmental Education" or contact Kerry Lemon at (936)468-5586 or lemonkb@sfasu.edu

Nacogdoches Naturally is a project sponsored by the SFA Gardens and is funded this year by the More Kids in the Woods grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture-U.S. Forest Service.

Azaleas Still

By Barb Stump

What's happening now in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden might surprise you. We still have at least 35 azalea cultivars blooming as of the first week of May. While it's not the riot of color that we saw that last week in March, there still are wonderful scenes to view. The Robin Hill hybrid evergreen azaleas and the Satsuki are examples of the latest blooming azaleas for us in our climate. There is the bright coral-orange from 'Robin Hill Gillie', as well as a frilly rose-pink from Aromi called 'Amelia Rose,' and 'Rosea' with rose-like flowers. Several of the late-bloomers are bi-colors, like 'Marian Lee' and a red-edged Harris hybrid called 'Vibrant.' Continue to visit the shady garden to enjoy the many layers of Japanese maple foliage in the heat of the summer.

Azalea Trail Report— The 15th annual Nacogdoches Azalea Trail ended March 31. The official Chamber of Commerce "ribbon-cutting" kicked off the event March 1, and we had several bits of video on KTRE and attention from the mayor

of Nacogdoches and State Rep. Travis Clardy. Of special meaning to me was the fact that Buddy Lee and Margie Jenkins came from Louisiana to attend this and the Azalea Symposium led by Azalea Society of



Aromi hybrid azalea 'Amelia Rose'

America President John Migas. I was able to thank them personally for the plants and guidance they have given us over the years. The wide range and number of azalea cultivars in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden is largely due to nurserymen and members in the ASA.

The symposium topic was "Building Azalea Gardens, Large and

Small" and was a great overview for novices and expert alike. We are working with some community partners to see if we can do an "Azalea Clinic" and residential planting project in the fall. That is a great time to plant azaleas, as the weather gets cooler, and the plants have an easier time getting established with winter rains. More information will be coming soon.

We had wonderful support from the Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau throughout the trail and appreciate their help with registrations for both the Symposium and Little Princess Tea Party. Little princesses paraded around, learned about how butterflies hatch, enjoyed a story about a mermaid and a little girl read by Melissa Livingston and songs sung by SFA vocal student Flora Wall. The party was sold out. To register to be one of the 100 lucky people to attend next year, check out the CVB Azalea Trail Web page—

www.nacogdochesazaleas.org. Ticket sales will open on Feb. 3, 2014.

PNPC Update

By David Creeh

While the construction of the Conservation Education Center is going to dominate the landscape at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center, there's plenty of excitement elsewhere. Greg Grant, our "new" PNPC research associate, brought in the best-ever contribution of native plants to the Spring Garden Gala Day Plant Sale! At the north end, we have a new planting of blueberries – yes, they're natives! – with

some great new varieties, including Pearl, Gupton, Prince, Earlibird Blue, Pop's Choice and Red Red Red (yes, that's the name!). To make sure this summer goes easy, we've installed a drip irrigation system, and each plant gets one gallon per day, enough to survive and even thrive. Next to the blueberry planting is our half circle planting of 38 Muscadine grape varieties. If you part the foliage now, you can see a crop of little

grapes well on their way to an August harvest. Finally, the landscape at the PNPC is getting a transfusion of new native plants here and there in the front of the Tucker House, and some major changes are planned along Sara's Branch. So, even though construction will dominate our lives for the next nine months, there's still some great native plant horticulture happening. Make a visit!

The Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Center

By Elyce Rodewald

Monday, April 29, 2013, may have seemed like any other Monday at SFA Gardens—Dr. Creech’s “list” appeared in our email inbox, Duke loaded a gator with tools and headed to the garden, and Dawn organized student workers and already seemed to be planning for the next sale. Barb was thinking about the Azalea Convention, Kerry was getting ready for the after-school program’s open house, and Elyce and the Education volunteers were leading second graders on another Arboretum Adventure. Meanwhile, something exciting was happening at 2900 Raguet St. The Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Center was officially under construction. Surveyors and utility workers appeared. No turning back—the long-awaited day was finally here!

The Conservation Education Center will provide much-needed public restrooms and storage space and also provide a large, open and naturally-lighted meeting area for educational programs. Currently, many programs are cancelled due to inclement weather. Elyce Rodewald, education coordinator, said our dream was to create a space that blended into the environment at the PNPC and was, in itself, a world-class teaching tool for sustainable design. Harold

Hall, assistant director of SFA’s Physical Plant, points out the building’s sustainable features:

1. Building oriented to reduce solar gain
2. No additional parking created
3. Bicycle racks will promote bicycle use
4. Site will be protected during building construction



A preview of the Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Center

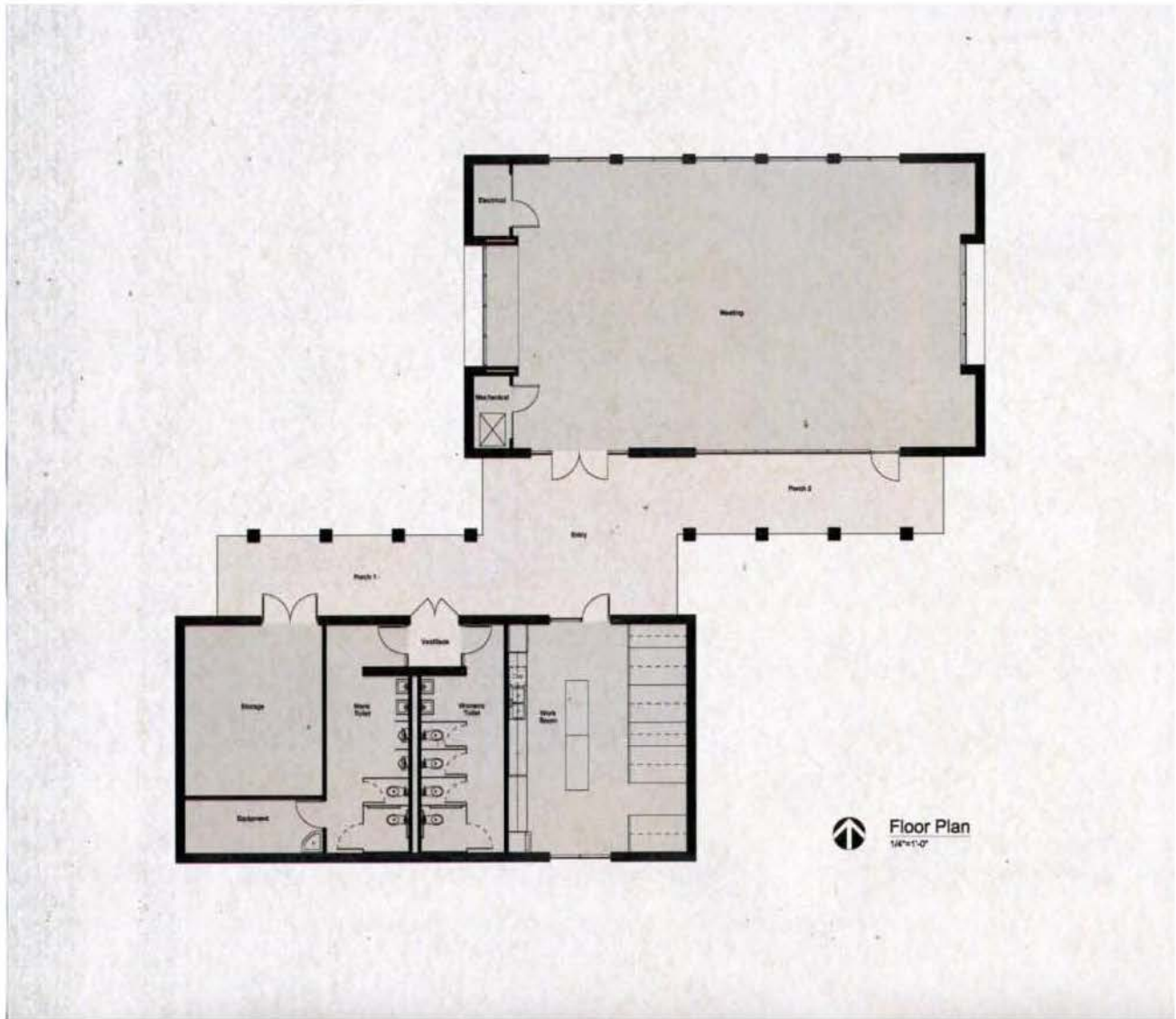
5. Open space is maximized in building design
6. Heat island roof is solar-reflective
7. Construction waste management will be implemented
8. Regional and low VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) materials will be used
9. Day-lighting will reduce use of electricity
10. Natural ventilation is included in meeting room and on porch
11. Windows are low E glass with thermally broken frames

12. Low-flow plumbing fixtures will be installed

This project is truly a community effort. We are grateful for the generous support of foundations and community members who have funded the design and construction. We appreciate the support of our administrators and of the SFA development office staff who

support the educational mission of the SFA Gardens. We are thankful for the SFA physical plant staff and SFA Board of Regents Building and Grounds Committee who have been integrally involved in the design and planning phase and will continue to handle the innumerable construction details. We are indebted to so many others who have nurtured the idea of an education facility created in the 2000 PNPC master plan by Darrel Morrison.

So, please pardon our construction site during the coming year. The trails and gardens will remain open and inviting. We hope you will continue to visit with the cattails and yuccas, the butterflies and bumblebees, the hummingbirds and red-shouldered hawks. Stroll along the trails, enjoy the sounds of the forest, and remember to check on our progress—the Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Center will soon be a reality!



Pass the Peas, Please Greg Grant

First of all, I'm going to make an assumption that if bright green little rounds of buckshot, mixed vegetable medley, and split pea soup fill the cupboards of your mind at the mention of "peas," you're probably not from the South. Those are English peas. We don't live in England. And besides, the English are known for their beautiful gardens, NOT their cooking.

I never have liked English peas, probably because most of them I ever ate came out of a can. Vegetables should come to your table straight from a garden, not from a can. I am, however, quite fond of split pea soup. Of course, I'd probably be fond of split shoe soup if it had a piece of ham floating in it!

OK, if I'm not going to evangelize about English peas, what kind of peas am I going to preach about? This brings up a problem. There's no universal name for our "peas" here. But when we say "peas" in the South, we shouldn't have to explain what kind we are talking about! If you're from the South, you KNOW what kind we are talking about. The kind folks used to shell under a shade tree with their friends and neighbors.

Now if you weren't born and raised in the South, I'm sure you feel compelled to put a label on them. That's OK, as long as you grow and eat them. Southern peas, cowpeas, field peas, black-eyed peas, purple hull peas, cream peas and crowder peas are a few of the names you might be familiar with. And though they are in the same

family (Fabaceae) as English peas, they are actually more closely related to beans.

Our southern peas are from Africa. They were probably brought into this country with the earliest slaves. This explains why they thrive so well during our blazing hot summers. The names



Pea patch in the pasture at Greg's house

Southern peas, cowpeas and field peas are general names for all the peas in this group. They are grown primarily in the South, were once commonly grown for cattle fodder and, of course, were grown by the field full. As a matter of fact, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were both pea farmers.

Black-eyed peas, purple hull peas, cream peas and crowder peas are all different forms of Southern peas. Black-eyed peas have purple-black eyes on cream colored peas, have cream colored hulls when ripe and are frequently served up at New Year's for good luck. Athens, Texas, "the black-eyed pea capitol of the world," is known for its Black-eyed Pea Jamboree held the third weekend in July each year. Purple hull peas have wine-red eyes

on cream colored peas, boast pretty purple hulls when ripe and are probably the most popular form across the South. Don't tell Athens, but these are a little tastier, not to mention prettier than black-eyes. My momma serves them up almost weekly in the Grant house. Cream peas are, of course, cream colored with "no" eyes, have cream-colored hulls when ripe and are somewhat of a Southern delicacy due to their delicate flavor and slightly lower production. They range in size from the tiny Lady Finger type to the larger, more productive Zipper Cream crowder. Texas A&M introduced a highly productive new one several years ago named Golden-eye Cream that I've planted this year.

Crowder peas can be any color and usually have cream-colored hulls when ripe. My grandfather's favorite was the shiny purple-black, Black Crowder, while my mom favors the cream-colored Zipper Cream. They are called crowder peas because the somewhat larger sized peas are jam packed into the hulls, giving them their characteristic flat ends.

If I could only grow one vegetable in my garden, it would be peas. They are easy to grow, very productive, very nutritious, and, as nitrogen fixing legumes, even help improve the soil. They grow quite well in most Texas soils as long as they have full sun and warm temperatures. The acidic, sandy soils of East Texas are their favorite, though. Your local feed store is the best source for pea seed. It's also quite easy to dry and save your

Peas, cont.

own seed like I do.

Although black-eyed peas are available dried from the store, most people consume their assorted Southern peas freshly shelled from the garden. I remember as a kid sitting in the front yard shelling peas at my mom's Aunt Nara's in Shelby County, along with my Grandmother Emanis, and my mom. It didn't seem like so much work when you were gossiping!

I grow so many peas now that I finally invested in an electric pea sheller. I have to admit my mom did most of the hand shelling be-

fore, though I've always kind of liked shelling peas. As long as I'm being completely honest, she actually did the investing as well. I do the growing and machine shelling however. We have purple hull peas as every day peas and Zipper Creams as Sunday and holiday peas. One year I grew 12 different kinds, and my family insisted they liked the old ones best. Change doesn't come easy in East Texas.

Cooking peas is quite easy. First, sauté a piece of salt pork or bacon in a pot. Add some chopped onion if you like. Add fresh peas

(soaked over night if dried), water, and seasoning to taste. I'm happy with black pepper and seasoned salt. Cook them until tender, adding water as needed to keep from scorching them. Nobody likes blackened crowders! Most beginning pea cookers don't cook them long enough (BB's!) and don't season them enough (bland). You'll get the hang of it. Left over peas are great, heated on the stove or in the microwave. My Granny even made me fried pea patties once. If you don't like them, give them to somebody that does, ME!

Much Ado About a Lot of Things! By Dawn Stover

We don't have any major construction at the Mast Arboretum, but we've been busy, nonetheless. Luckily, we have our most successful Garden Gala Day plant sale under our belts, and can breathe a little easier and garden a little more. How about a little fun with plant sale numbers? We had 383 varieties of plants available this year, more than 300 hours of volunteer time in April, 54 little red wagons, 500 printed plant sale brochures (100 more than last year, and we still ran out!) - which means at least 1,000 guests from near and far, and we raised more than \$47,000 to help keep our gardens running, staff paid and gardeners educated! At the risk of dating myself (yes, I'm facing a milestone birthday this year) this was my 31st plant sale! When I came in 1997 as a graduate student, our sales were small and still held in the greenhouses behind the SFA Agri-

culture Building. I remember making \$6,000 at my first plant sale, which in itself is a long way from the



Garden Gala Day hat made by Pam Cunningham

lemonade and card table Dr. Creech reports from the very first plant sale. We truly have a first class event now with guests from near and far! The veteran sale goers are familiar with our rules, and are quick to point them out to the new-

comers if they cross the boundaries. Our repeat customers are old friends by now, and we know the ones looking for that one precious plant or the ones planning to turn their cars into jungles for the drive home. One familiar customer, Pam Cunningham, went so far as to make a little Garden Gala Day hat for her puppy Mia! We treasure the friends we've made along the way and look forward to meeting new ones. Thank you for supporting our gardens and for loving our plants.

The gardens have really enjoyed this prolonged spring with blossoms lasting far longer in the cooler weather. In turn, our student workers haven't wilted either! With the ever-present guidance of Duke Pittman, the Mast Arboretum, Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden and Gayla Mize Garden are all in fine shape to start the summer - not that we're ready for summer temperatures yet!



Some of you may have noticed that the Bunny is missing. Our good friend and amazing artist Jeff Brewer entered Bunny in five-shows across the country hoping to be accepted in to at least one. Well congratulations to Jeff on making it into each of the five shows, making four more blue bunnies, and delivering sculptures from Florida to Iowa and parts in between! Jeff has threatened to bring all five back to the SFA Gardens. In the meantime, he and I are collaborating on something really cool. I hope to have more to report to you in the next newsletter.

And finally, our pergola along the LaNana Creek has gotten a much needed facelift thanks to an Eagle Scout project by Lucas Kahn of Boy Scout troop 100. Lucas did an amazing job of sandblasting and painting the ornamental ironwork and removing the concrete pavers, replacing them with ADA compliant crushed gravel. The icing on the cake takes the form of two beautiful cedar swings that Lu-

cas built and hung in the pergola. I find guests in the swings each time I walk by, no matter the time of day, so a big thank you to Lucas and troop 100 for this wonderful beautification project in the arboretum!



Lucas Kahn stands in his recently completed Eagle Scout project at the Mast Arboretum