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## SFA Gardens Newsletter, August 1998

SFA Gardens, Stephen F. Austin State University

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## **AUGUST 1998**

**OCTOBER 3, 1998 - THE ARBORETUM'S FABULOUS FALL FESTIVAL IS RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER -**

### **PRESS RELEASE:**

The SFA Arboretum in Nacogdoches, Texas, will celebrate another fun "Fabulous Fall Festival," October 3, 1998 from 9 AM until 5 PM. The event includes an all-day plant sale featuring a wide range of new, uncommon, and Texas-tough container-grown herbaceous and woody plants, a silent auction of rare plants, some special surprise entertainment, children's programs, refreshments, educational booths and walk and talk presentations in the garden. The Festival is organized by the SFA Arboretum Volunteer Corps Organization, Master Gardeners and SFA Horticulture Club. For more information: Call 409-468-3705 at SFA or the Nacogdoches Chamber of Commerce at 409-564-7351.

**AUGUST 28, 1998 - FRIDAY ALL DAY - WORK PARTY FOR ALL VOLUNTEERS - GETTING PLANTS READY FOR THE FALL PLANT SALE.**

Dawn will be leading the charge for this work party day (468-4047). Anyone wanting to pitch in, meet at the headhouse behind the Agriculture building and put in a few hours - we need the help! Dawn has put together a wonderful cross-section of woodies and herbaceous perennials - what may be the best we've ever offered will go on sale. The August 28th work party will pot up rooted cuttings and seedlings coming out of the mist or hardening off tables and tackle a wide range of greenhouse/nursery chores - with 5 weeks of growing time before the sale, we're in under the wire. For info: 468-4404.

**OCTOBER 1 AND 2, 1998 - THURSDAY/FRIDAY - THE LAST MINUTE RUSH WORK PARTY FOR ALL VOLUNTEERS.** Raising the tent, getting plants to the proper spot on benches, labelling for days, sprucing up the gardens, and an endless list of other chores that never seem to get done until the last moment! Join in the fun.

**THE FRIENDS LECTURE SERIES - UPCOMING TALKS:** 7 PM and every 3rd THURSDAY of each month - Room 110, Agriculture Building, Wilson Drive; great talks, refreshments and always some rare/unusual/exciting plant give-aways.

August 20, 1998: Greg Grant, SFA, "Fall Bulbs for the South"

September 17, 1998: Dr. Dave Creech, SFA, "The SFA Arboretum - is it time to make a statement?"

October 15, 1998: Dr. Shiyou Li, SFA, Nacogdoches, "Chinese Natural Philosophy, Landscape Painting and Landscape Design"

November 19, 1998: Scott Reeves, Treeseach Farms, "What's Hot at the Nursery"

December 17, 1998: Greg Grant, "SFA, People and Their Plants"

LECTURE SERIES RECEIVES GIFT IN MID-JUNE, 1998! Due to the generosity of Ms. Theresa Reeves, the "Friends of the Arboretum Lecture series" was endowed in the memory of Theresa's late husband, Lester Reeves. The Les Reeves lecture series . . . this is wonderful and is something that will go a long way toward bringing in outstanding speakers for our monthly event. Thank you, Theresa, for making the Arboretum's podium a little taller - your gift means more East Texans will share in all the gardening education and excitement via the Arboretum's growing outreach.

NACOGDOCHES COUNCIL OF GARDEN CLUBS GIFT! Thanks goes out to the Nacogdoches Council of Garden clubs for a gift of \$2400 dedicated toward the Azalea Garden . . . something we sorely needed to keep the project on line. It's encouraging to see the city, local gardening groups and enthusiasts, and the SFA administration recognize the potential associated with an 8-acre color spot right on University Drive. The implication for tourism, student recruiting and retention, and the quality of life in Nacogdoches is enormous.

GREG GRANT IS STILL ON BOARD! Hooray! What a joy to have such a big vision, big action colleague on board. Petunias and verbenas and Brugmansias and variegated cannas galore and lots of smarts flowing everywhere. Greg has been on board since October of 1997, a whopping ten months (is this some sort of record for him?) and the plant and people life in the SFA Arboretum will never be the same. He makes this place more educational, dynamic, interesting, fun and ever-changing. Greg's perennial plant selections and introductions are eye-opening - and no doubt are making and will continue to make a big splash quick in the wide, wide world of southern horticulture. It makes sense: find that backbone of Texas-tough, plants with a long season of color, generally trouble free and full of garden vigor. If you haven't taken a stroll lately, notice the renovation going on south of the Agriculture building - more sunlight and a garden display full of fun and color - gives everyone that visits a real "sense of place." The Elking Environment has a brand new look and sports a Verbena and variegated Canna trial. Most amazing, the fountain is working, the irrigation system hasn't missed a beat and the lights are working. Now, close your eyes. It's just a suspicion, but I predict that the fall will see the land south of the Agriculture building undergo even more drastic changes. Greg does have a design and plan for the area in the works - I'm not sure exactly what's going - although someone did say something about being able to roll a bowling ball all the way from the Wilson Drive sidewalk to the shade garden entrance? We may be talking Guinness. I fear that even the Araucaria is wincing in anticipation of just what lies ahead.

FALL BULBS FOR EAST TEXAS - Greg Grant's handout for the 8/20/98 Friends of the Arboretum lecture series.

Planting time: Summer (June-September ideal).

Characteristics: Summer dormancy, fall bloom, winter foliage. Will generally grow in beds, groundcover, or turf. Very drought tolerant.

1. Hymenocallis eulae (rare East Texas native)
2. Oxblood Lily (*Rodophiala bifida*)
3. Rain Lily (*Zepheranthes*, *Habranthus*, *Cooperia*, etc.). *Zepheranthes candida* the best and most common.
4. Spider Lily (*Lycoris* sp.) *Lycoris radiata radiata* the most dependable and most common.
5. Autumn Crocus (*Sternberia lutea*)

Sources:

1) Old House Gardens, 536 Third Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48103 #313-995-1486 (catalog \$2); 2) Daffodil Mart, Rt. 3 Box 794, Gloucester, VA 23061 804-693-3966 (catalog \$1); 3) McClure and Zimmerman, 108 West Winnabago, P.O. Box 368, Friesland, WI 53935, 414-326-4220 (free catalog); 4) Plantation Bulb Co., Box 159, TyTy, GA 31795

912-388-9999; 5) King's Nursery, Highway 84, Tenaha, TX 75974 409-248-3811

For more information see:

Garden Bulbs for the South (1994, Taylor Publishing) by good friend Scott Ogden...THE authority on Texas bulbs.

**ARB SUFFERS THROUGH WORST DROUGHT EVER - SUMMER HEAT IS WITHERING.** After a wet spring, the last rains fell in early May and the Arboretum went with almost zero until early August - it's been a hard-fought, hose-dragging marathon. Add to that many days of over one hundred degrees and you've got a scorcher. We've had droughts before - and this one was the toughest. While 90% of the garden is under some sort of overhead sprinkler system, 10% is not. Adding to the problem is the fact that we're now home to many, many one and two year old plants in the garden . . . as we always say, it's the establishment years that make the difference. This summer has seen watering take on the number one labor time cruncher in the garden. It seems as if we've been in a revolving pattern of fixing heads, making repairs and dragging hoses to fight the fringes of our irrigated patches. Caps and hats go off to Dawn, Holly, JC and the rest of the crew for stamina to bring the garden through this scorcher in such excellent condition. It's been a crisis management summer.

**AZALEA GARDEN ON TRACK** - What can you say? Big cheers for the steady and dogged stamina of JC Andersen, Johnnie Heath, Mike Frith and a few others. Great

students that put in the time and passion needed to tame the forest floor of the azalea garden. Hot grueling work and a piece of art still in progress. Now that the forest is opened up and bit more park-like, we've been able to stand back and look at what we have. We still remain in awe of the potential and the beauty of the place. It's truly majestic - there's lots of character to the spot and the lay of the land provides an excellent vista from our well-traveled University Drive. Ms. Barb Stump, the GRA on this project, has been doggedly bringing the design into being and we are talking details. Barb is the most organized human on earth. The entire garden has been surveyed on 1' elevation changes (Barb and George Willard) and Barb has created AutoCAD map files of the Azalea garden. Very impressive. We've made some on-the-ground design changes to deal with irrigation or other realities. A key feature will be a sunlit circle featuring a council fire area perfect for gatherings, educational events, and a fine jumping off place for walking/talking tours. Greg brought to the table the design fitting the scale of the place and the vista from University Drive. The council fire was enlarged, a few trails repositioned, some bed shapes modified to deal with irrigation risers. We now have a garden that brings the focus back to the trees. There are some amazing patriarchs in our forest cathedral that will bring the perfect backdrop to a forest floor of azaleas and companion plantings.

What do we now know? Barb has outlined the beds and trails with stakes and spray paint to provide an on-the-ground feeling for the design. As per our first AutoCAD calculations, the front four acres of the Azalea Garden will enjoy about 98,000 square feet of bed space - a little over two acres - with a total perimeter of all the beds at around 5366 feet (just over a mile!). Now we are ready for the tough part - trying to get sandy loam moved into the beds to create mild berms. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know we need quite a bit - pretty much close to 1000 cubic yards would be ideal if we shot for 3" - 4" deep over all beds - but we may have to get by with less and go with a more modest approach working sand in near the plants only. Because the key climatic event for the Azalea Garden will be floods, we need to do everything we can to provide plants with a quick opportunity for recovery from waterlogged soils - the slightly raised bed approach will do the trick. With many types of azaleas - not all - it's important to provide sharp drainage around the root system. It's amazing what four to six inches of elevation above the surrounding soil surface can do for plant health. To make the sand happen we are working with the city (J.C Hughes, city manager, Scott Ingalls, City Planning, and John Phillips in Public Works) and the SFA Physical Plant (John Rulfs). We are planning a one or two-day caravan of sand to the site - sand coming out of the city's airport project using city and SFA dump trucks. If we can make this happen before fall rains end the chance is the big question. Time will tell. We are also looking far and wide for a bark mulch donation. The Fall 1998 planting of 2000 plus azaleas and companion plants will require about 700 cubic yards of pine bark and the enthusiasm to move it into place! Anybody got any ideas?

Thanks must go out to all the nursery generosity that has flowed our way since the Azalea Garden project was kicked off in October 1997. Helping us get the first year's start guaranteed: Lee Howell of Rocky Creek Nursery in Lucedale, Mississippi; Tom Foley of Hines Nursery in Houston, Texas; Leon Macha of Greenleaf Nursery in El Campo,

Texas; and Ted Doremus and Mark Bronstad of Doremus Nursery in Warren, Texas. All get a robust thank you for donating plants. Our Fall 1998 needs of 2000 plus plants is now a done deal. Biggest load was 1200 plants from Rocky Creek with trucking by Bright Coop. Thank you, Charles Bright! - and thanks to the volunteers that helped unload that monster 48' trailer! Another plus, Greg picked up in early August a nice collection of deciduous azaleas and hybrids from Woodlanders Nursery in Aiken, South Carolina - Thank you, Bob McCartney. Greg made the return trip with temps hovering around one hundred degrees - towing one of those small U-haul trailers. I think he said someone owes him a plate of brownies or something.

Biggest kick so far? With workers on board, turning on for the first time our brand new three-acre solid-set irrigation system was a real good feeling - it's a brute - 60' X 60' spacing, Western Ag heads producing a radius of about 55 feet . . . and our first trial run revealed an amazingly uniform two inches in an overnight set.

What's on for the fall Azalea Garden agenda? Get the front four acres of forest floor as clean as possible. Move sandy loam into place. Plant 2000+ in October or November. Apply a generous application of bark mulch right after planting. Then pray for no floods for six months.

FREE FIREWOOD ANYONE? Volunteers are encouraged to load up firewood that lies on the western edge of the Azalea Garden forest. No way to miss the pile. You can access the firewood by driving through the grounds parking lot (west side) and then follow the trail that leads north. Bring your truck and have at it - this is officially titled refuse removal.

THE CHILDREN'S GARDEN - Dedicated May 23, 1998 the pavilion is finally rock-solid and imposing. We've got the sealer painted on and we're still moving in sand to get ready for some of the permanent plantings that will go in this fall. What a beautiful structure - a perfect high-visibility feature for College Avenue and a great addition to Nacogdoches.

SEMINAR ON WHEELS - a travel class on nurseries and public gardens of the south - a first for the Horticulture program - May 17 - June 2, 1998. With two vans and eleven students, Greg and I fought the highways and byways of getting to and from gardens, nurseries and gardens of the south. Lots of high quality experiences gained and an eye-opener for all of us. This was a first course and it proved to be every bit as exciting as we had planned - good enough that we think it ought to be an annual event.

TWO TRIPS TO EAST COAST IN JULY, 1998 - A ten-day sojourn to the East coast found the little Toyota weighed down with plants for the return trip - some purchased, some gifts, some cuttings, some seed - many woody and herbaceous goodies enjoying a first exposure to Texas. Say hello to Texas heat kind of thing. End result is a shade house that should be condemned for packing too many plants in too small a space.

The first trip was a dash to Raleigh, NC where Tony Avent of Plants Delights Nursery was kind enough to provide a wonderful room and a base of operation. Plant Delights is a head-ache creating, mind-boggling nursery and the most intense two-acre garden this side of Jupiter. Dawn Parish joined via air with the goal of taking in four days of NC nurseries and gardens - gathering cuttings and plants - and bringing back what she learned to the SFA Arboretum. Matt Welch, former student now working at Taylors Nursery in Raleigh, and Todd Lasagne of the Raulston Arboretum accompanied us on many of the must-see stops. The return trip included stops at Nursery Caroliniana (Ted Stephens), an outstanding wholesale nursery that specializes in the rare and unusual. Woodlanders is right down the road and Bob McCartney and I were to load up a special collection of deciduous azaleas in a trailer. Suffice it to say we will not try to hook up a Toyota to a U-haul trailer again (after four hours of trying, we learned it can't be done without a special electronic kit for the lights). After giving up, promising Bob we would return in a few weeks to get the plants, and waving goodbye, I made a dash and late entry into the nursery bull pen of Dr. Mike Dirr, the plant-possessed guru of the University of Georgia.. After swapping lies and plants, I made the dash for the Texas state line. Just a few of the special plants and collections that come to mind: an Abelia collection including a rare species, *Abelia serrata*, as well as selections of Mike Dirr *A. chinensis* X *grandiflora* crosses; a collection of *Chamaecyparis thyoides*, Atlantic white cedar, and *Cephalotaxus*, Japanese Plum Yew - species, cultivars and unnamed selections; two *Amorphophallus* species new to our garden (Oh my God), a variegated *Fatsia japonica*, a wide swath of *Hydrangea* species and cultivars and many, many others.

A quick turn around and a second trip in July was to the Cullowhee Native Plants Conference in Cullowhee, NC, at Western North Carolina University. Just west of Asheville, Cullowhee is nested in the mountains and couldn't be a better respite away from Texas heat and drought. The attendees were an eclectic crowd of mainly southern and eastern plant enthusiasts – academics, nurserymen, landscapers, garden writers. I presented the Three R's - rescue, research and reintroduction - endangered plant conservation program of the arboretum.

CONTAINER NURSERY EXPANSION - as this update goes out, we have added and are adding considerably to our container-growing space. In the Azalea Garden, we have commandeered the spot inside the fence that surrounds the old ROTC tower (what a view from the top!) and that area is now brimming over with azaleas. Bench terraces are being added to the North and South shadehouses - intentions are to develop some full sun to almost full sun conditions for container-grown plants. We certainly need the space. JC Andersen, Bart Brechter, and Johnnie Heath making it all happen.

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT – Wayne Weatherford is making the Arboretum's website a real joy to behold. The fall will see major additions to the site – expansion of the plant features; more Children's Garden and Azalea Garden information and visuals; big improvements planned for the Three R's portion of our website.

THE THREE R'S – The Arboretum's endangered plants conservation program is probably one of the best kept secrets of the SFA Arboretum. We have received two grants

that will up our profile in the conservation arena. One is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife grant that will DNA fingerprint *Hibiscus dasycalyx*, the Neches river rose mallow, and closely related species that are interspecifically hybridizing with the three known communities of the Neches river rose mallow. Dr. Bea Clack, Chemistry, will be tackling this exciting work – work that should define the genetic status of this species (or is it an ecotype, a form, a botanical variety?) and determine the best conservation path needed to save the plant. The second grant comes to the program from the University Research Council, a grant to work with *Gaillardia aestivalis* var. *winkleri*, the white firewheel, known only from Hardin county in Southeast Texas.

Dawn Parish will be wrapping up her MS thesis work with *Hibiscus dasycalyx* and she will be collecting the third year of data from the introduction project at Mill Creek Gardens.