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Summer 2003

## Pineywoods Native Plant Center, Summer 2003

SFA Gardens, Stephen F. Austin State University

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# Education in Action



Saturday Seminars are popular with area gardeners. Topics have included container gardening, the urban forest, soils, bulbs for East Texas, and native plants.



The Observation Bee Hive, located near the ornamental grasses at the Mast Arboretum, is maintained by volunteers from the East Texas Beekeepers Association, and it remains one of the most popular stops for children and adults.



"Go Wild!" at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center introduces students to the ecosystems of East Texas.



Mill Creek Gardens was the site for the second Sierra Cubs Day Camp. Campers learned about outdoor safety, forest ecosystems, East Texas wildlife, predator-prey relationships and water ecology. Mast Arboretum and Sierra Club volunteers donated over 700 hours of time for this incredible and outrageously fun week!



Students from Carpenter Elementary enjoyed using the brush broom in the Heritage Garden Arbor during Arboretum Adventures. Hands-on activities involving soil, trees, flowers, and bees are also included in the 2-hour tour.

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One thousand area school children participated in the annual Bugs, Butterflies and Blossoms festival held at the Arboretum and hosted by Cheryl Boyette with Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful and Dr. Alan Sowards with the SFA Department of Elementary Education.

**Join the fun! Last year, over 8300 people enjoyed educational activities at the SFA Mast Arboretum and Pineywoods Native Plant Center!**



# SFA Mast Arboretum News Summer 2003

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## Tropical Temptations for the East Texas Landscape

By Dawn Parish

Gingers are quickly becoming popular additions to southern gardens. Although many people think that they are tender tropicals unable to withstand our less than tropical winters, there are many species and varieties of gingers well suited to our climate.

Ginger is the name widely used for members of the *Zingiberaceae* and *Costaceae* families. There are as many as 2000 species worldwide between both families. There are as many as 300 varieties available in the United States, most of which have been introduced within the past fifteen years. Gingers not only provide ornamental value, many have medicinal and culinary traits as well. The ginger root we often find in the produce section of our grocery stores is actually an attractive ornamental plant known as *Zingiber officinale*, or "Edible Ginger."

Gingers are relatively easy to grow, and are often resistant to most pests and diseases. They require rich, well-drained soils, and plenty of water and fertilizer throughout the growing season. The rhizomes prefer to be on the dry side during their dormant period during winter. As this is generally our wettest season, well-drained soil is a must. A mixture of half sand and half compost provides a wonderful environment in which to grow gingers.

The easiest group of gingers to grow in our area is the "Butterfly Gingers", members of the genus *Hedychium*. The most common is *Hedychium coronarium*, better

known as "White Butterfly Ginger." Large white flowers dominate architectural foliage, and smell something akin to honeysuckle. *Hedychium coccineum*, or "Orange Bottle Brush Ginger", boasts large spikes of spidery orange flowers. "Kahili Ginger", or *Hedychium gardenerianum*, offers large, very fragrant yellow flowers. There are also many worthwhile hybrids to choose from as well. "Hawaiian Pink" offers large pink flowers, and "Mr. Moy" boasts variegated foliage with orange flowers.

Butterfly gingers bloom best in full sun with plenty of water in the summer. They will produce moderate blooms in light shade.

The "Hidden Gingers" bestow us with very dramatic flowers. Their name comes from the fact that the flowers are often hidden among the foliage, or near the ground. *Curcuma elata*, the "Giant Plume Ginger", is the easiest and most spectacular hidden ginger for East Texas. Unusual pink flowers burst through the soil in spring before the towering eight-foot foliage has time to awaken from winter slumber. Many people comment that the foliage closely resembles banana leaves. *Curcuma inodora* blooms simultaneously, but has very light pink



*Curcuma elata*

flowers and foliage reaching only five feet.. The summer blooming *Curcuma australasica*, "Aussie Plume Ginger", offers dark pink flowers and blooms concurrently with foliage that reaches three to four feet. *Curcuma petiolata* 'Emperor' is a striking variety with finely variegated leaves and pure white flowers. This variety requires more shade and water than its cousins, but is extremely easy to grow and multiplies well. Hidden gingers perform well in either full sun or light shade.

## Hardy Fern Foundation Satellite Garden

By Roger Hughes, Fern Curator

The “Spiral Gingers” make up the genus *Costus*. Their name is derived from spirally arranged foliage on sturdy stems, much like a spiral staircase. The plants in this genus have a wide range of light requirements, so it’s easy to find an appropriate selection for any situation. The most popular spiral ginger is *Costus speciosus*. Dark green leaves spiral up four-foot stems and terminate with large white flowers that extend from dark red cones. While it performs best in full sun, its variegated form beautifully lights up dimly lit areas. Perhaps my favorite spiral ginger is *Cosuts curvibracteatus*. This diminutive shade lover never reaches more than three feet and delivers waxy orange flowers throughout the entire summer. The flower buds are edible and taste like sour apples. A similar cousin is *Costus spicatus*. It also enjoys shady locations, and has waxy orange flowers, but the plant can reach heights of six feet. The hardiness of spiral gingers may not extend into zone eight. The only species in our trials that has proven winter hardy is *Costus speciosus*. Nonetheless, the spiral gingers are easy to over winter indoors and are worthy enough garden subjects to do just that.

The “Peacock Gingers”, *Kaempferia spp.*, are the best choice for deep shade. Any amount of sunlight will make the leaves curl protectively into tight rolls. *Kaempferia pulchra* is most extensively grown peacock ginger. The intricately patterned leaves grow closely along the ground making it an excellent ground cover candidate. Periwinkle flowers appear intermittently from mid-summer well into fall. The varieties of *Kaempferia pulchra* are numerous, but the best one I’ve seen is called “Silver Spot”. *Kaempferia rotunda*, also called “Asian Crocus”, produces large purple and white flowers in spring before the foliage appears. The foliage is similarly patterned like *Kaempferia pulchra*, but grows upright to about eighteen inches, and they look remarkably similar to the prayer plant that we grow indoors.

We’ve just scraped the surface on the many gingers becoming available. The few mentioned here are reliably hardy and proven performers in East Texas. I encourage you to visit the SFA Mast Arboretum to see specimens of all the names mentioned here. Mercer Arboretum in north Houston also has a spectacular display. If you find one that you can’t live without, there are two very good sources for gingers. Plant Delights can be found at [www.plantdelights.com](http://www.plantdelights.com) and offers gingers and other tropicals hardy to zone 7. Stokes Tropicals, [www.stokestropicals.com](http://www.stokestropicals.com), offers a huge selection of tropicals, including hundreds of gingers. They will list the hardiness of each plant, remember that we are zone 8, and you can even search with that criterion in mind.

The move of the HFF Satellite Garden to the Azalea Garden has been completed. The soil here is deep and sandy, which will give the ferns excellent drainage. Very large hardwood trees provide the shade during the hot summer. Openings in the canopy on the south will allow sun to the plants during mid winter. Water sprinkle heads have been located to give maximum coverage over the entire fern bed.

The ferns were planted at random, keeping only the species together. Some rocks were added for the ferns that like to have their roots protected. Two to four inches of pine bark mulch was added over the complete garden area. Temporary signage was added and the water system was checked while the ferns were being water-in.

During the move some of the ferns were lost during the flood. Most of the 2001 shipment was lost; hopefully they may be replaced.

Each September the Hardy Fern Foundation sends a group of ferns to each Satellite Garden to be tested. The group usually contains from 3 to 5 plants each of several different species. The plants are always in excellent shape with a five-inch root ball. Each year we fill out a form to be sent to the HFF giving the status of each fern in the garden. Some do well but others cannot take our heat.

As our garden expands we plan to add some Japanese maples and other flowering trees. Also, a sign will be added in the area showing THE HARDY FERN FOUNDATION SATILLITE GARDEN. As our ferns grow and multiply this should be a very good asset to the Azalea Garden.

### Roger’s Top Six Ferns for East Texas!

Here are six native ferns that do very well in east Texas. All of these were growing on the property where we built our home.

The **Christmas Fern** (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) is evergreen and has fronds from 1 ½ to 2 feet long. They look great in groups of three planted about 2 feet apart.

The **common wood fern** (*Thelypteris kunthii*) has many common names, for example: River fern and the Southern maiden fern. This fern is not evergreen, but the long arching fronds are 3 to 4 feet high. This fern spreads medium fast, but can be controlled easily because of the shallow roots. Good plant around Azaleas and Camellias.

**Cinnamon ferns** (*Osmunda cinnamomea*) are one of the first to send up their crosiers (The coiled developing leaf of a fern) in the spring. They are deciduous, erect with fronds from 3 to 4 feet high. Use as a specimen plant; they look great alone.

**The Royal fern** (*Osmunda regalis*) is deciduous, erect with fronds 3 to 4 feet high. This plant shows well when planted in groups of three. Use a lot of humus when planting and keep the plant on the wet side for best appearance.

**Southern Maidenhair** (*Adiantum capillus-veneris*) is well known all over the south. You will find it in most shade gardens growing next to a sidewalk or a limestone rock in a humus moist soil. The fronds are arching and are only 10 to 18 inches high. It is deciduous but will be the first up in the spring.

If you have a shady area that stays moist, I would recommend the **Sensitive fern** (*Onoclea sensibilis*). This fern is deciduous, very erect with fronds 1 ½ to 2 feet high. It is usually found in spreading colonies and if the moisture is kept up during the dry season, this fern will take some sun. This is one of my favorites.



Matt Welch shows how very skillful he is with the arboretum’s new Bobcat, as he brings in a bench into the newest area of the garden, what we call the “Serenity Garden” (beds 40-42). This area is also home to a growing collection of Hardy Fern Foundation ferns, thanks to Roger Hughes. (Photo by Janice Lindquist)

## Azalea Garden News: Boy Scouts Build Benches Or, Getting Ready for the Trail

By Barbara Stump

Some e-mails are really great! Last summer, I received one from a Boy Scout named Kyle Lindquist, asking if he could build benches for the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. His timing was perfect, since we had just ordered timbers for just this purpose. Kyle and I talked about why we needed benches, and I asked him to go look for places that he thought would be good for visitors to stop, rest, and enjoy the garden. Benches are great because they are useful for anyone who wants to stroll, rather than hike or bike, through the garden. This means people with baby strollers as well as people with walkers or wheelchairs.

So, Kyle organized his friends from Boy Scout Troop 100, submitted his application for this as an Eagle Scout project and they got busy. He managed the whole process, from securing donations of materials from paint dealers (Flynn’s and Sherwin Williams, for stain) and hardware stores (Burns, Sutherlands) to running a car wash and garage sale to cover additional costs for concrete and hardware for installation in the garden. August 24, 2002 was the big delivery day, when the Boy Scouts brought several pickup trucks packed with 15 benches, nine 10-foot ones, and six 5-foot ones. Kyle directed Matt Welch in loading up ten of these benches and placing them around the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. (Five benches are now going to fill in at the PNPC, thanks to Kyle.) Look for them at the entrance by the kiosk sign, as a grouping in the native azalea trail beds (25-28), and in groupings in the camellia forest loop beds (18-22). Well done, Kyle and friends. His final report is working its way through Boy Scout channels. The project was a big success as far as we are concerned.

Benches are also great ways to recognize people important to us. We have brown anodized aluminum labels inscribed with silver letters for several of the benches. Two recognize major donors: In the Council Ring, we recognize Dorothy Mize Wisely for her generosity in creating the Azalea Garden Endowment, and, one near Bed 31 recognizes the Azalea Society of America for their contributions of most of the special azalea cultivars now planted in Beds 29-33. Memorial benches include one donated by the Flora Garden Club to remember the late Dr. William Jones, husband of Arb Volunteer Delores Jones. Thanks also go to the Bluebonnet Garden Club for another one, and one commemorates my own parents. For more information on memorials, contact me at [bstump@sfasu.edu](mailto:bstump@sfasu.edu) (or by phone 936-468-4129, afternoons).