Fall 2004

Pineywoods Native Plant Center, Fall 2004

SFA Gardens, Stephen F. Austin State University

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Beat Those Winter-Time Blues with an SFA Mast Arboretum Garden Seminar!

Grow your garden of knowledge by attending an SFA Mast Arboretum Garden Seminar! In-depth programs provide practical information to gardeners in all stages of growth—from beginner to experienced. Seminars are held from 9:00 a.m.—Noon in Room 118 of the Agriculture Building on Wilson Drive. To register, contact the education office at 936-468-1832; email eredewald@sfasu.edu; or send payment with name, address, daytime phone number, and seminar title to: SFA Mast Arboretum Gardens Seminars, PO Box 13000-SFA, Nacogdoches, TX 75962-3000.

On the Trail of the Red-Flowering Sweet Osmanthus, Osmanthus fragrans

By Dr. David Creech

In plant-hunting circles, one of the elusive treasures yet to make its way into the USA is the red-flowered Sweet Osmanthus. There have been rumors and some have said they have seen pictures, or knew someone who had the plant, or heard of someone who had a friend who saw a picture, and there have been other intriguing tales but still, no factual encounters. Well, I can now say that the rumors are over. I have seen O. fragrans ‘Zhusha Dangu’ and while I caught it just past peak with petals a bit spent, I can say, yes, it’s red enough to make the mark. Sure, there’s a slight cast of dark orange in the petals but there was enough red there for me to go drooling and wanting to snatch a cutting. I didn’t because Chinese junks are reported as spartan, but I’ve got the ball rolling to introduce this cultivar and about a dozen others in the near future. Let’s just say I told my host “I have got to have this one.”

In fact, during October when the species is at its best, over ten Chinese cities honor the plant with a wide variety of special holidays. In a carnival-like atmosphere, Chinese citizens flock to Sweet Osmanthus gardens to bask in the fragrance and glory of the plant.

China has applied to the International Horticulture Society to be the official international registry for the genus, and while that application is pending, there’s good reason to think it’s a slam dunk. After all, China has a long history with the plant and harbors most of the world’s ancient germplasm of the species. Old trees are revered, signed and interpreted, and given holy attendance. Protective fences mark their importance. Tourists flock to gawk at their size and glory. The most ancient plant known in China rests comfortably in the grounds of the Shengshui Temple, Nanzheng County, Shannxi Province and is over 2100 years old. It’s 40 feet in height, and this magic tree was planted by the Xiaohe himself, the Minister of the Han Dynasty. The most impressive tree that I saw personally was the stately specimen in the landscape of the “Status and Use of Osmanthus fragrans in Southern USA landscapes,” which was quite a challenge since so little is documented. However, with the help of friends across the South, I managed to talk that acquaintance to our hosts with the plant in the USA and its production in the nursery industry. The conference included one day of talks from international and Chinese lecturers and then, best of all, Janet and I enjoyed two days of touring gardens in Suzhou and Hangzhou famous for the species. The ancient Sweet Osmanthus of China is one of the ten traditional flowers of China. The sweet smelling tree is revered with many specimens over 1000 years old! In fact, during October when the species is at its best, over ten Chinese cities honor the plant with a wide variety of special holidays. In a carnival-like atmosphere, Chinese citizens flock to Sweet Osmanthus gardens to bask in the fragrance and glory of the plant.
Nacogdoches should be the very first official Osmanthus garden in the USA! Think about it. The Mast Arboretum is ideally suited to test, protect and promote the wide variety of cultivars found in the gardens of China. I imagine a mapped, signed and data-based campus-wide collection—a sweet-smelling garden to serve as the foundation for a new and growing industry.

**Influence of Nitrogen Fertilizer Timing and Rate on Azalea Bloom**

By Julie Fullenwider

The azalea is a must-have shrub in the southern landscape. Fertilization recommendations often suggest fertilizing the plant after bloom to discourage early bloom and damage due to late spring freezes. The objective of this study was to determine the effect of fertilizer timing and rate on azalea bloom. Five varieties of azaleas were selected for this study, using sixty plants in each variety, for a total of three hundred plants. The four varieties located in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden on the Stephen F. Austin State University Campus include ‘Koromo Shikibu,’ ‘Poukhanense Compacta,’ ‘Kaempferi 6811,’ and ‘Roses.’ One variety, ‘Elise Lee,’ is located in front of Steen Hall also on the Stephen F. Austin campus.

Three rates (0, 50 and 100 lbs of nitrogen/acre) of ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) were applied at four different times of the year (December, February, March, May). Each plant received a single application of fertilizer. Each fertilizer treatment was replicated five times within each variety.

Beginning in March, buds and blooms were counted on a previously tagged branch of each plant. This data was put into one of four categories:

- **Stage 1:** Pink tip (bud swell with first color showing at tips)
- **Stage 2:** Pink bud (expanded and just prior to opening)
- **Stage 3:** Open (fully open in prime show)
- **Stage 4:** Bloom decline (bloom in wilt or other indication of decline)

In terms of popularity, Sweet Osmanthus has a long way to go in the USA. We visited one nursery near Guangzhou that produces 1.5 million plants per year! While most Chinese nursery plants are destined for the China marketplace, which is huge, there is a growing interest in exporting new cultivars and plants to the international market. For that to happen there will have to be cooperation, marketing and promotion. I have proposed to the Sweet Osmanthus Branch of the Chinese Flower Association that the SFA Mast Arboretum in Nacogdoches should be the very first official Osmanthus garden in the USA! Think about it. The Mast Arboretum is ideally suited to test, protect and promote the wide variety of cultivars found in the gardens of China. I imagine a mapped, signed and data-based campus-wide collection—a sweet-smelling garden to serve as the foundation for a new and growing industry.

**Nacogdoches Recognized as First-Ever ASA Azalea City**

By Barb Stump

On November 2, 2004, the first-ever Azalea Society of America “Azalea City” designation was presented to the City of Nacogdoches. Mayor Bob Dunn accepted the award presented on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Azalea Society of America. The award is represented by a plaque with the citation and colorful images of an evergreen azalea and a deciduous azalea.

In the award notification, the chairman of the ASA’s Azalea City committee, Joseph Schild, said about the Nacogdoches application: “It is clear from the information and application submitted that the City of Nacogdoches, Texas has an active history of promoting and celebrating azaleas with various municipal, civic and community events. Azaleas are obviously a part of the community culture and it is only fitting that your city should receive from the Azalea Society of America the certification as an ASA Azalea City.”

This award recognizes the efforts of many people who are planting azaleas, learning about them, and making the annual Nacogdoches Azalea Trail a success. Among these are Azalea Trail Committee members Gayla Mize and the Flora Garden Club; Rocky Dumas; Sherry Ward; Eloise Adams; the Convention and Visitors Bureau board and staff; local nurseries; and SFA Mast Arboretum staff and volunteers. The Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden at the Mast Arboretum is a central feature of the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail. The Azalea City designation is intended to recognize cities that promote and display azaleas in festivals, azalea trails, garden tours, and lectures. The award can be used in marketing future azalea-related activities.

**Update:** Jack’s tired, lost a little weight, but he’s still got all his charm . . .

By Dr. David Creech

Jack, SFA’s amazing first-ever-to-bloom-in-Texas corpse flower, has settled into his new home in the glasshouse, and he’s ready for a long winter. After all the excitement of Jack’s Jamboree, it’s time for a deep sleep. It’s true we had high hopes for seed set but we failed. Pollen flown in from a University of Connecticut plant was applied through a window we cut near the bottom of the spathe. Everyone had a hand in swiping the pollen on with a spatula, so now we can all blame each other for the failure, I guess. At any rate, the peduncle supporting the cone-shaped fruiting head melted into a pitiful puddle of despair—taking with it our hopes and dreams for baby jacks to spread across the South. To add to our disappointment, we learned that the University of Connecticut plant was both failed to set seed, so we’re zero for three attempts. Not too good. Since that time, we’ve waited and wondered. Is Jack dead? Will he ever come back to life? What should we do? Well, with a great deal of theater and a little Jack Hart jag, I decided to use a Plant Propagation lab to dig Jack up from his slumber, clean him off and repot him in the greenhouse with fresh media.

Jack seems healthy. He’s still dormant, lighter than last year, and looks a bit tired, but not too much worse for the wear. We noticed a few cortomet-like objects on Jack’s side and bottom and these were “popped” off and potted up . . . maybe some future Baby Jacks here? Most interesting was the weight loss. In March, 2004, Jack weighed in at 26 lbs. 2 ozs. After flowering amidst TV, news folks, admiring visitors and a little Barry White music, Jack settled into a deep sleep. He now weighs 21 lbs. 12 ozs. which means that flower cost him just a hair under 5 lbs. Flowering cost him about 20% of his original weight . . . maybe some future Baby Jacks here? We just don’t know; but if it happens, we’ll get the word out.