



Garden News

Notes From the Director

Dr. David Creech

On September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike came rolling into town and made a mess in our fair city – and in our garden world. For a dozen scary hours, citizens hunkered down and hoped to survive. Patriarch pines and oaks fell right and left, scattered like matchsticks near – and sometimes on – our homes, power lines and businesses. Ike skidded by Nacogdoches to the west which meant we were on the dirty east side of the beast and when the clouds parted, we were left marveling at the awesome power of Mother Nature. Greg Grant counted 32 of our biggest trees scattered here and there along the front of the Pineywoods Native Plant Center. It wasn't all that many years ago I was complaining we needed more sunlight. Well, after the tornado in 1999, Hurricane Rita in 2005, and now Ike in 2008, all I can say is "OK! That's enough!" The damage could have been worse. Our beautiful Tucker house came through unscathed. The Horticulture facilities at the PNPC and Mast Arboretum emerged more or less untouched. Yes, we lost a few big trees. The gardens were strewn with branches and the place looked a mess but, all in all, life has quickly returned to normal. At the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, about a half dozen big trees came down but miraculously missed our brand new benches and for the most part we lost very few specimens in the collections there. So, all in all, we came away luckier than many citizens who found their homes damaged, with some totally destroyed.

On a more cheerful note, we

are happy to report that there's a big change a brewin' at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center (PNPC). With a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "Partners for Fish and Wildlife" program, we have officially declared war on privet. Privet is an invasive exotic plant from China which was introduced long ago into the southern USA as an ornamental useful for making a thick hedge. Well it's now the beast that dominates so many forests of the South. Botanically, it's *Ligustrum sinense*, a cousin of wax leaf Ligustrum, *Ligustrum japonicum*, another common though less invasive exotic common in so many southern landscapes. Both thrive in part shade and sprout readily from the stump. When privet is at its worst it simply smothers out all other native plants as they try to get some share of the sunlight. Getting the privet population down to the ground is the first step in any eradication program. Raven Environmental was contracted to tackle between twenty to twenty-five acres of the mid-slopes and bottomlands of the PNPC forest. Our goal is to be essentially free of this noxious pest in three to five years. After we've taken control, we'll be nurturing the native plants that emerge - as well as introducing a wide array of native plants most likely to find the place an appropriate home.

By the time this newsletter reaches you, I will once again have visited China. This time as part of a team of eight SFA faculty members led by our very own SFA Provost, Dr. Ric Berry. We are on a mission to Nanjing Forestry Uni-

versity (NFU) and our goals are simple. We hope to sign a collaboration document for the development of a long-term cooperation between Stephen F. Austin State University and Nanjing Forestry University (NFU). The goal will be faculty and student exchanges and the initiation of cooperative research projects. NFU is a huge university with over 200 Forestry faculty, over 6000 undergraduate and 2000 MSc and PhD students, which is perhaps more than all the forestry faculty and students in the United States. I have visited this institution before, and during one of those visits, Dean Jin Chi Zhang mentioned that they were interested in developing a relationship with an institution of higher learning in the United States. When I learned they were opening negotiations with the University of Georgia, I said, "You don't want to do that! You want SFA!" Thus, plans were set in motion for this visit. Six NFU scientists, including Dean Jin Chi Zhang, visited here in April 2008 and for a week we enjoyed a busy schedule of visits to forests, nurseries, research facilities, and attended meetings to flesh out the details for future work together. This will be a great experience for all of us, one that will contribute to an international tone here for many years ahead.

We are also excited to report that the George and Fay Young Foundation has awarded the PNPC a grant for two projects. The first is for moveable benches in the Quonset greenhouse. This is something that will get us off the floor

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and up on benches for easier work and maintenance - and help us old timers who just don't bend over quite like we used to. The second project is for a green roof structure at the north end of the property, the first step in a long term project to evaluate

dry-loving plants suitable for green roofs in Texas.

Finally, for those who read the last newsletter and are dying for a beaver status report, here it is. They're still there, and almost

weekly I go down there, shake my fist at the dam, and remind them that they are not to cut down anything more than ten feet from the bank - or they will have to endure my wrath. So far, they seem to be listening.



Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden News

Barb Stump

'Tis the season to begin spotting fall color—yellow from our Florida maples (*Acer barbatum*) and every shade from peach to blood red from our Japanese maple collection (mainly *Acer platanum* and *A. japonicum*, with other choice species as well). Each year we try to find the “best red” Japanese maple, so the hunt is officially on. Two maple experts recently said that our typically high winter temperatures that are much above 32°F limit the depth of color here. Keep your eyes open and report in what happens in your gardens as well.

Thinking along these lines prompted me to bring in one of these Japanese maple experts, Elizabeth Mundy, to speak at our 2009 **Azalea Symposium**, March 21, 2009, 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Her company, Acer Acres, Inc. of Beaverdam, Virginia, grafts over 400 varieties of Japanese maples. She also sent a number of maples to us in 2005 to trial for sun-tolerance. All but *Acer circinatum* have held up well in our “Sun-Test Bed” by the handicapped parking area. So, our annual Azalea

Symposium is “branching out” with a theme of “Azaleas and More—Companion Planting for Azaleas.” Elizabeth will recommend ways to use Japanese maples in our landscapes, and she will teach us the fine art of grafting in a hands-on grafting workshop. What a unique opportunity! Dawn Stover, Ornamental Plant Evaluations Research Associate at the Mast Arboretum will help us focus on other perennials that work in the partial shade of azalea gardens, with “Perennials for Shade.” Symposium fee is \$50, which covers lunch, the

grafting workshop, your own grafted maple and my guided tour of the SFA Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. More details will follow in the next newsletter, but mark your calendars now for March 21.

March 14-28 is the 10th annual Nacogdoches Azalea Trail. Other events include: the Little Princess Tea Party March 28th. We co-sponsor both the symposium and the tea party with the Texas Chapter of the Azalea Society of America and the Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau.



Finally, we now have more benches in the garden so that people can stop along the paths, rest awhile in comfort, and enjoy the beauties of the garden. Thanks to our Mize Wisely Azalea Garden Endowment, we were able to purchase 15 six-foot benches and 15 eight-foot metal benches in a simple, sturdy design. We have placed them strategically, so you can be sure to see some of the garden's most beautiful views from these benches. Previously placed wooden benches built by Eagle Scouts and memorial or honorary benches remain as well.

Cottage Gardening...It's GOOD TASTE Now!

Greg Grant

I was never a big fan of cottage cheese. The stuff's just so bland and colorless (now I know what they do with milk when it goes bad). Cottage gardening, on the other hand, is a fragrant feast for the eyes.

I started landscape gardening in the traditional modern way. I looked around at the nicer homes in town and decided to copy what I saw. Heck, I thought all good landscapes were supposed to have a front yard full of manicured turf, Asian jasmine, dwarf burford hollies, and liriopse, punctuated by a few topiaried ligustrums (we all want to fit in, right?). In my humble gardening opinion, there's nothing wrong with this style of gardening. To each his own. The problem lies in the fact that many folks copy the same style over and over again, leading to what some call "cookie cutter" landscapes.

Among the first things I think about when I see mass generic home landscapes are the homeowners. Are they related? Octuplets? Descendants from an inferior race of distant aliens?

Heavens no! They're all individuals. They eat different foods. Go to different movies. Drive different colored cars. Have different spouses (we hope!). Then why on earth do they have matching landscapes? It reminds me of those moms (sorry sister Kerry) that wish they had twins and dress their unsuspecting children just alike.

Every individual garden is a blank palette; a painting waiting to happen. If it's your palette and your paint, then for Heaven's sake, paint it the way you like it! If you like wild colors, then run wild. If you prefer natives, go native. If you crave bare dirt, then get bare and get dirty!

OK, we're getting carried away here. The point is, every landscape is a personal expression of the owner. Most people are afraid, however, to reveal their personality through their landscape. "What if people don't like it?" they say. WHO CARES?! If they don't like it, tell

them to get right back to their house and gaze upon their own landscape.

I enjoy folks complimenting my landscape, but that's not the real purpose for it. Gardening is for the gardener. It's therapy. It's also the number one hobby in the country. You don't golf to impress others do you? I don't golf, so forgive me if the answer is yes.

Now, for those of you that don't know what we're talking about, we'd better define cottage gardening.



The purist defines cottage gardening as an informal style of landscaping consisting of a mixture of flowers, herbs, vegetables, and fruit trees surrounded by a fence and bisected by a pathway from the gate to the door. Historically they belonged to the poor people living in simple cottages, hence the name. Others say they are random utilitarian plantings containing whatever plants folks could use and lay hands on, accented by whatever local building materials were available. Usually all the plants in cottage gardens were what we now call "passalong" plants, those that weren't purchased, but begged or swapped instead. The flowers usually consisted of reseeding annuals and perennials that returned year after year. Of course most of these gardeners didn't have access to water, fertilizer, or pesticide so they were the original xeriscapes, organic gardens, and "earth kind" plantings.

Nobody worried about color schemes, what was in the latest magazine, or whether they would win yard of the month. As a matter of fact the only rule I

can think of for cottage gardening is that there ARE NO RULES!

Cottage gardening came to America with the early settlers and still persists to this day among the poorer class and in crazed gardener circles (because it lets them plant lots of plants without having to worry about design!). Typically this historic style of landscaping looks best around smaller frame cottages, farmhouses, restored homes, bungalows, cabins, etc. But if properly thought out and unified, many fine cottage gardens can exist around upscale palatial homes, especially older ones.

Of course cottage gardens aren't for everyone. They're just too random and disorganized for some. In this case, consider patches of cottage gardens in containers or formal rectilinear beds. Choosing a color scheme is also a stabilizing option. In addition, surrounding it or backing it with a clipped hedge also helps rein it in. As a matter of fact this is exactly how perennial borders were invented. If you think about it, they're just cottage gardens tossed into a formal bed. Sort of an English meets French combination.

Cottage gardening is the rave throughout the country right now. It fits right into our interest in perennials, old-fashioned plants, herbs, natives, diversity, the Green movement, and organic gardening. So whether you go whole hog or just try a sampling, there's something there for everybody's taste.

For more information on cottage gardening see:

[Passalong Plants](#) (UNC Press, 1993) by Steve Bender and Felder Rushing

[The Southern Heirloom Garden](#) (Taylor Publishing, 1995) by William C. Welch and Greg Grant

Also consider joining the Southern Garden History Society. Individual dues are \$25 and include their excellent quarterly publication, *Magnolia*. You can contact them at: 336-721-7328 or www.southerngardenhistory.org.

Mark Your Calendars!

2009 Les Reeves Lecture Series

The SFA Arboretum Les Reeves Lecture Series is held the third Thursday of each month from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm in room 110 of the SFA Agriculture Building on Wilson drive. It is FREE and open to everyone! Refreshments are served before the talk and a rare plants raffle is held afterwards.

JAN 15

Leon Young (Dr. Red Dirt), SFA Soil Lab

“I’ve got the dirt on everyone - soil testing, results, pH, liming and all your credit information”

FEB 19

Severn Doughty, Louisiana Nursery Landscape Association
“Cold hardy palms and other surprises for southern landscapes”

MAR 19

Todd Lasseigne, Paul Ciener Botanical Garden, North Carolina

“Birthing a new public garden in North Carolina and the new plants that will make it the garden in the world.”

APR 16

Jeff Adkins, SFA Horticulture

“Everything you wanted to know about breeding but you were too shy to ask.”

MAY 21

Jim Robbins, University of Arkansas

“Hey, I’ll trade you this pink flowered fringe tree for that contorted pine.”

JUN 18

Matthew Chappel, University of Georgia

“Single-wide gardening: When buying a 12 pack is more important than shrubbery”

JULY 16

Cliff Shackelford, Texas Parks and Wildlife

“Do hummingbirds migrate on the backs of geese?”

AUG 20

Jason Griffin, John C. Pair Horticulture Center, Kansas State University

“I know it’s insane, but it’s working! We’re growing trees on the treeless plains of Kansas”

SEP 17

Leon Macha, Greenleaf Nursery

“Observations on the Texas nursery industry: Operating for profit and not practice.”

OCT 15

Richard Olsen, US National Arboretum

“Tree temptations and tribulations at the National Arboretum”

NOV 19

Brent Pemberton, TAMU Overton

“Plant award programs - friend or foe? Award winning plants at the Overton Center”

DEC 17

Dave Creech – SFA Gardens

Tips and tricks on how to deal with unruly garden staff, students and volunteers

Mark Your Calendars!

“Deck the Halls!”

December 13, 2008

Join Dawn Stover to learn how to create elegant wreaths and garlands using materials from mother nature. Learn principles of wreath, garland, and centerpiece construction and make a wreath to enjoy at home for the holidays. 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. members \$25. Non-members \$35.

Call 936-468-1832 or email erodewald@sfasu.edu for reservations.

2009 Garden Seminars

January 24 - Intro to Floral Design with Michael Maurer

February 21 - Powder Puff Mechanics with Craig Morton

March 12 - Grafting with David Creech

Call 936-468-1832 for reservations.

2009 Don't Miss Dates

March 21 - Azalea Symposium

March 28 - Little Princess Tea Party

April 18 - Garden Gala Day

September 19 - Pirates of the Pineywoods

October 3 - Fabulous Fall Festival



Ahoy, Matey!

Elyce Rodewald



You may think pirates are a thing of the past, but recently a motley crew of buccaneers was seen at the SFA Mast Arboretum as part of our first Pirates of the Piney-



woods Party. Young pirates were treated to an afternoon of adventure and excitement visiting four different ports of call. Carla Garnes, an Amigo del Bosque with the La-



tino Legacy program at SFA, introduced the swashbucklers to a corn snake, and then the pirates chose between silly and scary “underwater” story telling hosted by Dr. Cheryl Boyette, SFA Gardens board member, and Ben Sultenfuss, environmental education volunteer teacher. We sailed ahead to Port Challenge where we swung on ropes, balanced on stepping stones and walked the plank across croc-infested water. The treasure was finally located in the sparkling sand along the Arboretum trails, and it seems that the crew went home with plenty

of loot. The afternoon finished with some delicious grog and grub, sponsored by the Nacogdoches Junior Forum. Plans are already underway for next year’s party, scheduled for September 19—National Talk Like A Pirate Day!



Pirates of the Pineywoods promotes families enjoying the outdoors and raises funds for the education program at the SFA Mast Arboretum and Pineywoods Native Plant Center. Special thanks to: Nacogdoches Junior Forum, Java Jacks, Latino Legacy, Mike and Barb Stump, Cheryl and John Boyette, Ben and Cathy Sultenfuss, Megan Hutchison, and Mike and Jim Bates.

Prune Them Trees Good

Jeff Adkins

I've now experienced my first Texas-style hurricane. I know they can be worse, but I can honestly say that in many ways I prefer them to the nor'easters that were an all too common winter occurrence in Rhode Island. Although the winds weren't usually hurricane force, the freezing temperatures and snows could be truly miserable. Destructive and disruptive as they are you can, if you try, find interesting lessons following the high winds of hurricanes and nor'easters. I found some in Rhode Island and plenty more after Ike, and I didn't try hard at all.

That trees often fall, split, defoliate and generally suffer under hurricane force winds is not new news. However, why some trees or branches fail when others do not may sometimes be mysterious, but can often be explained by poor tree structure. Poor tree structure is common in landscape trees, and often the proper and systematic pruning required to develop good structure does not occur.



Poor tree structure + decay + nor'easter = disaster

Most of us logically assume that trees planted or naturally seeded into a landscape "know" how to grow properly, but both genes and environment influence how a tree grows and matures. Trees growing in a forest will look very different if they are instead grown in the open landscape. Because of competition for light and reduced wind, trees in a forest grow taller and have few lower branches. Also, branches in the canopy of forest grown trees are spaced further apart along the trunk.

If you take the same species of tree (i.e. same genes) and plant it in an open landscape, the abundant sunlight and increased wind exposure will cause it to



Trees growing close together in a forest type setting.



(Above) Open grown tree with low, tightly grouped branches which often results in included bark. (Below) Branch on left should have been removed long ago. Doing so now would leave a large wound that would likely not completely heal.



develop very differently from its forest-bound relatives. These open grown trees will typically be shorter, have branches very low to the ground and have canopy branches grouped tightly together along the trunk. It's these tightly grouped branches that often cause the most trouble.

When branches are attached closely along the trunk, there is little room left for expansion. Ultimately, many of these branches begin to press together smashing bark in between resulting in what's known as included bark. Moisture is easily maintained in and around the included bark creating a wonderful site for pathogens to begin rotting away. These problems can be easily avoided if a pruning program is implemented following planting. When you find two branches attached closely together you can usually simply remove one and allow the other to grow. It's always best to get them while they're young; the rule of thumb for branch removal is to do so only when the diameter of the branch is less than half that of the trunk at the point of attachment. The larger branches become, the less likely complete healing of the pruning cut will occur, leading to decay.

Probably the most serious and pervasive problem among tree pruners, professional or not, is a failure to understand thinning, and the consequences of doing it wrong. If you're planning to thin a tree or hire a professional, ask this: Do you know what "Lion-Tailing" is? If not, put away the pruners and find out before anyone touches your trees. In short, lion-tailing is the complete removal of all interior vegetation leaving foliage only at the tips of branches. Sure it may provide a neat and clean, albeit unnatural, appearance, but it does nothing good for the tree and will likely result in a shortened life span. About a month before Ike hit, I watched a local arborist lion-tail a large water oak (*Quercus nigra*). Sure enough, here came Ike and there went many branch ends. There's plenty of other examples of this around Nacogdoches and beyond.

Lion-tailing is mistakenly thought to protect trees from high winds by allowing wind to harmlessly pass through the

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Prune Them, *cont.*

canopy. Without foliage to “catch” the wind, branches won’t bend and break, right? Nope. That might work for a leafless tree, but what good is that? What does happen is that all that foliage left on the ends of branches catches the wind, bends and breaks. Also, removal of interior foliage often slows the increase in diameter (and strength) of branches.

One of the worst consequences of removing all those interior leaves is that the tree is left with a lot less capacity to manufacture energy via photosynthesis. Trees will try to correct this by developing water sprouts (epicormic shoots). Although beneficial, water sprouts are at first not strongly at-

tached to the tree and will need to be thinned over time to restore good tree structure.

Another rule of thumb: never remove more than 25% to 35% from young trees and 10% to 15% on older trees during any one pruning cycle. Young trees (under 10 years) are typically pruned every two to three years, older trees every five to six years.

If you are planting a new tree, it will be fairly easy to develop proper structure. Unfortunately, we often inherit older trees that have not been maintained properly. Although it may be difficult or impossible

to correct bad structure in older trees, it’s almost always possible to improve structure and eliminate hazards. Trees are a long-term investment, and it’s worth the time, effort and money needed to help them develop properly. Find a licensed arborist or learn yourself; doing both is not a bad idea. There’s lots of information available in books and magazines. Internet resources can be sketchy, but Dr. Edward Gilman of the University of Florida provides good information: <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/>.

Take a good look at your trees, get good information, and then prune them trees good!

Greyblue Spicebush Dawn Stover

Leave it to the herbaceous person to choose to write an article on a tree with very little research in print. That’s just what I’ve done, but I’m going to stick with the subject. I joke with nursery friends that if there’s a tree around here I take notice of, then it’s a tree worth noticing. You see, most herbaceous plant lovers walk through gardens looking down at the ground while our woody-plant loving friends walk with a decidedly upwards bend in their necks.

One tree REALLY caught my eyes last fall and caused me to turn my eyes upward. Our *Lindera glauca*, commonly known as greyblue spicebush was anything but greyblue. The fall color on this little gem was something akin to warm cider on a cold, wet winter day. Not quite yellow and not quite orange, with definite hints of peach and persimmon. Sounds like a good wine, doesn’t it?

So, as fall approaches and the leaves begin to change, I find an opportunity this year to bring you the beauty of this plant so that you may get to enjoy it in person.

There is precious little literature on greyblue spicebush, but it’s definitely worthy of greater study. It is native to Japan, China, Korea, and Taiwan, but it makes itself perfectly at home in East Texas. It’s hardy from zones 5 to 9, and prefers moist, well-drained soils and a sunny to partly

shaded location. It can be considered a large shrub or small, multi-trunked tree - depending on which you need in the landscape. Whether shrub or tree, it is deciduous, so consider that in your placement.



Inconspicuous yellow flowers appear in spring before narrow, blue-green foliage appears. In fall, leaves turn that beautiful shade of peachy-persimmon I mentioned, finally turning a lunch-sack brown and per-

sisting through the winter. Small, round fruit turns glossy black when trees are in full fall color. The fruit is hard to see from a distance, but up close makes a nice contrast against the bright fall foliage.

Seeds, stems, and leaves all emit a spicy fragrance when crushed and the little information I found on this plant in *The Hillier Manual of Trees and Shrubs* notes that this and other species of *Lindera* are used in China to make incense or joss-sticks.

Greyblue spicebush is in the Laurel family and is in good company with other Laurel family members such as cinnamon, sassafras, avocado, and bay laurel. This family tends to have a high content of ethereal oils, which are important sources for perfumes and spices. This is definitely the case with the greyblue spicebush, and the fragrance would certainly make a nice complement to any incense, candle or potpourri.

As far as sources, I’m not sure there are any. The plant in the Arboretum came from Camellia Forest Nursery, but this plant is no longer listed in their catalog. You can bet on one thing - as soon as I figure out the trick to propagating this beauty, you’ll find it at the plant sale! Until then, come by and see it in person.

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Fall Fandango

By Dawn Stover

The first day in November was a beautiful day to have a party, and indeed we had a beautiful party on that day. Each year the SFA Gardens hosts the Fall Fandango to honor our donors. Each year we try to have it in a different location to showcase a different part of the garden. It's a day to dress up the garden and to dress up the staff! This year's festivities occurred in a magical, sparkly setting that by day we call the Jim and Beth Kingham Children's Garden. This already beautiful setting was truly transformed into a lovely, twinkle-lighted fantasy adorned with candles aplenty and natural elements embellished with sparkling silver.

Despite the fact that SFA football was playing nearby at Sam Houston, that it was the first day of deer season, and another university - whom I've been informed that I have to schedule any future plans around - was playing a televised game, the evening was well attended. I'm pretty sure we dazzled a few folks with the setting too!

The meal, catered by SFA's own Student Center Catering, consisted of baked white fish with dill sauce and beef burgundy. We're so appreciative of the quality and service the Student Center Catering provides especially since Elyce, Barb and I don't have to do the dishes when all is said and done. A delicious carrot cake decorated in a lovely fall-leaf theme was generously provided by Carol Moore and was a sweet complement to a lovely evening.

Shades of Blue led by Larry Greer provided lively accompaniment to the evening and even had several couples whirling and twirling under the Children's Pavilion.

Although Dr. Creech had just returned from China mere hours before the party, he was in fine form recognizing the contributions of our donors and special guests. He also gave special recognition to board member and long-time supporter Dr. Cheryl Boyette for her dream of building the Children's Garden and her leadership in making it happen. And it just so happens that this year,

the Children's Garden Pavilion turns ten years old.

You are receiving this newsletter because you support our efforts here at the SFA Gardens. Regardless of your membership level and regardless of your attendance at the Fandango, please know that all of us here at the Gardens are grateful for your support.

Josie and George Crowson dance under the twinkle lights at the Fall Fandango

