



# SFA Gardens NEWS

## Notes from the Director

By Dr. David Creech

Last fall, I ran into a couple in the garden, and the conversation drifted to the incredible show of Japanese maples in the Ruby M. Mize and Gayla Mize Gardens. The woman was a gardener, but her husband was not. I mean, he liked the place, but his first task in the morning was not to rush out the door to see what was blooming. After the garden banter went on a bit too long, I could tell he was bored with our enthusiasm. Finally, he said, “But, really, what good do you do?” A cloud of *déjà vu* swept over me. I’ve had this battle before at SFA. In fact, in one long-ago spirited discussion in the Department of Agriculture, the usual battle for limited funds was in fine form. After one of my treatises for why the gardens deserved more support, one of my colleagues blurted out, “David, it’s just a garden!” So, after this latest challenge to why we exist, I sat on the porch and listed the good we do.

First on my list, there’s no doubt this is a university garden. We have a beautiful campus. We’re not called the university among the pines for no reason. Surveys show that students come here simply because of the beauty of the place. Gary Williams, grounds manager, and his crew do an

amazing job with too few personnel and limited resources. SFA Gardens and the grounds department are co-conspirators for a more beautiful campus.

On the academic front, we’re here primarily to serve the faculty, staff and students in forestry, agriculture, art, biology and education. The gardens are a living laboratory, and there’s rarely a week when we don’t see classes using the gardens as a learning resource.

Everyone agrees the gardens are full of recreational opportunities. Whether it’s the hiking/biking/dog walking/jogging crowd, the gardens are used. Seven miles of asphalt trails don’t just happen. The fact we’re integrated into the wonderful city Lanana Creek Trail project means our community is packed full of recreational opportunity. The trails are proof that SFA Gardens has a laser beam focus on helping make healthier faculty, staff and students. SFA Gardens is a living, breathing resource for Nacogdoches citizens and

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SFA Gardens serves several purposes for both the university and community. For example, the gardens serve as a place for educational and recreational opportunities.

tourists. We reduce stress, lower blood pressure and bring joy to our visitors.

The nursery and landscape industry in Texas is a \$4 billion industry at the producer level. Not bragging, but that's bigger than timber and poultry. Nurserymen and landscapers across this state and Louisiana recognize SFA's gardens as a resource. Partially because of all the new plants that make their way into the trade from our gardens. It's never easy to have a long-term woody evaluation program. After all, it takes decades to prove that a tree is adapted — that it ticks all the boxes for drought resistance, growth rate, consumer appeal and landscape durability. We do that.

Name a garden anywhere that has such a sizable presence in fruit evaluation. Our blueberry focus continues. Too many years ago, as an undergraduate at Texas A&M University, I worked for Dr. Hollis Bowen as a student worker. He let me plant the first blueberry plant at a cooperator farm near Buna, Texas. Here we are 50 years later and that industry still exists, and homeowners in Texas are still planting and enjoying this super fruit. If you haven't enjoyed the fig orchard or the muscadine vineyard at SFA Gardens, you should. All the latest genetics are on hand. Working with the City of Nacogdoches, we've made a mark at Pecan Acres Park with a mapped collection of pecan varieties. Most exciting, in 2014, SFA Gardens produced the first green or gold kiwifruit in Texas. This led to a Specialty Crops Block Grant by the Texas Department of Agriculture and this SFA/TAMU excitement has led to interest by potential investors and some New Zealand friends with a long history in the global kiwifruit business. Only time will tell if this is a new commercial crop for Texas.

SFA Gardens has spawned too many research projects to count. Our work at Moody Gardens has a focus on finding and evaluating climate change and salt-tolerant ornamentals

for a 21st century Texas. Our work with endangered plants has connected us with in situ and ex situ reintroduction projects and collaborations with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and other conservation-minded souls. We like to grow things, and helping the rare, threatened and endangered plants of East Texas is part of that.

I've long concluded that our most significant contribution may be environmental education for kids. What Elyce Rodewald, Jocelyn Moore and a strong army of volunteers have done is nothing short of epic. Each year, more than 12,000 kids and their teachers take advantage of outdoor learning experiences. This isn't just a walk and talk. No, this is a hands-on, science-based and curriculum-compatible program for local schools. We connect kids to forests, prairies, gardens, birds, bees, bats and all things outdoors. We're here to cure nature deficit disorder.

We educate the public about gardening. The Theresa and Les Reeves Lecture Series is now a fixture in our community — a fun event that attracts great speakers and a loyal crowd every second Thursday evening. Special seminars and workshops cover grafting, floral design, landscape tips and plant propagation. A "Wild About Woodies" event in June targets nursery and landscape professionals.

The Sculpture for All program is the brainchild of Dawn Stover, our senior staff member, and Jeff Brewer, assistant professor of art. It brings an art-oriented crowd into the garden and is now part of the culture of our university. Speaking of crowds, all are invited to our April 6 plant sale at the Pinewoods Native Plant Center. We hold two sales annually, providing Texas-tough perennials, annuals, ornamental grasses, natives, trees, and shrubs for local and regional gardeners.

So, in a nutshell, that's the good we do, and until next time, we'll keep planting.



## Camellia reticulata 'Frank Houser'

By Dr. David Creech

It's been a camellia year for sure. While we've had plenty of cold temperatures and our chilling hours are great, we've been blessed with few hard freezes to take the blooms away. While there are hundreds of remarkable camellias in our collection, there are some standouts.

When I think of camellias, I always think of Sherwood Akin, a wonderful plants man, friend and nurseryman from near Sibley, Louisiana. Sherwood was a character, and he thought he was so good he could root a fence post. Before he passed away in 2007, he gifted us the *Camellia reticulata* 'Frank Houser' and said it was the biggest and "best darn" camellia he had ever grown. I lean to thinking he was right. It features large, Texas-size blooms. Some report the blooms can reach 8 inches wide, but our experience is that most are in the 6- to 7-inch range.

Dr. Frank Houser was a true World War II hero, and he commanded the Third Army Hospital in Paris. He worked behind the lines at the Battle of the Bulge and treated massive casualties. After the war, he returned to Macon, Georgia, and spent his career in medicine. He was Man of



the Year in Bibb County, and the Medical Association of Georgia named him General Practitioner of the Year.

While Frank was a camellia hybridizer in his own right, 'Frank Houser' was actually the work of his friend and neighbor, Dr. Walter E. Homeyer. It first bloomed in 1984 and was registered in 1989 with the American Camellia Society. On the down side, this variety has been slow to root and slow to grow. 'Frank Houser' features a kind of splayed open growth and dark green foliage. When the blooms catch a rain, the branches weep under the weight of the large flowers. But when dry times return, they bounce back with good cheer.

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## A Bladderpod By Any Other Name Would ... Be Better

By Elyce Rodewald



Many, many years ago, before I worked at SFA Gardens, a young man named Jason Singhurst stopped at our house in San Augustine County and asked if he

could search for an endangered plant on our property. I was excited at the prospect of having a special plant nearby, and he seemed relieved that we did not meet him at the gate with a shotgun. He eagerly showed us photos and drawings, told us about the special Weches glades, and explained that his professor, Dr. Creech, would be so excited if he found another location of this rare plant.

Fast-forward a decade or two, and I am strolling through the woods near the house. I notice an odd little clearing, smell a refreshing scent of mint and see some unusual plants for our property — Manfreda and prickly pear cactus. Could

this be a Weches glade that Jason mentioned long ago? The short answer is, yes, it was a Weches glade, which is a seepy hillside with alkaline soil and the perfect habitat for the endangered white bladderpod. With help from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant, our family was able to reintroduce white bladderpods to this location.

To many people, even plant enthusiasts, bladderpods might be considered homely. They are members of the unassuming mustard family, and they have an unbecoming name, no flashy colors, unremarkable foliage, and tiny, unobtrusive blooms. I am emotionally attached to this tiny thing and, like an overprotective mother, choose different adjectives. I like to call the plant by one of its scientific names — *Lesquerella pallida*. *Lesquerella* rolls off your tongue with a foreign flair, so much better than being named after a body part. I use adjectives like diminutive, delicate or ephemeral and describe the colors as alabaster with accents of pastel goldenrod. I like to remind people that San Augustine County is the only place in the entire world that this plant grows. How special is that?

My husband, with the family dog in tow, starts watching for *Lesquerella* around mid to late March. He alerts me when

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# “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.” - John Muir

the plants emerge and the blooms start to show their precious faces. Last year, our little colony was in full bloom by April 4 with the round seedpods hanging around into late May and early June.

Habitat destruction has taken its toll on the bladderpods. Millions of years ago, oceans, sediment, and decaying plants and animals on the ocean floor covered East Texas. Over time, the oceans receded, but the rich sediments remained and created what we now call the Weches glauconite formation. The Weches rock, also called greenrock,

underlays the bladderpod glades and forms the characteristic alkaline soil. It is a popular and inexpensive road material, and it is easily extracted through open-pit mining.

The Macartney rose also has negatively impacted the white bladderpods. Farmers and ranchers used this Asian import to create natural fencerows because it forms dense thickets. Unfortunately, it also out-competes native grasses and shades out the bladderpods. Japanese privet causes similar problems by encroaching on the open glades.

I often ponder the importance of *Lesquerella*. What purpose does it serve in our East Texas ecosystem? What pollinates this petite flower? The seed oil of the species contains high amounts of hydroxy fatty acid, so perhaps the seeds are nourishing birds or mammals. Would anyone miss *Lesquerella* if it faded into extinction? Our environments and our communities are diminished by a lack of diversity. I am reminded by John Muir that every piece, no matter how small, is important.

**Note:** *Lesquerella pallida* has recently been reclassified as *Physaria pallida*.

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## Gardening for Wildlife

By Dawn Stover

For several weeks, it seemed like all of the gardening pages I follow on Facebook were sharing the same article on micro prairies — small plantings serving as micro habitats for wildlife. It is rare for the pages I keep up with to share the same information or articles, and it was nice to see this particular article repeated in so many instances. The prairie concept is a “drum” I’ve been beating for a while, and it’s good to see that people are paying attention to actions that they can accomplish to benefit wildlife, including birds, bees, butterflies and such.

The ultimate point to micro prairies is that the combination of all of these little garden efforts makes a big impact on the larger urban conservation landscape. All those little parts add up! While micro prairie is a new term to me, the concept is not. Backyard wildlife habitats, monarch way stations, pocket prairies and many combinations of those terms have been employed for years. If putting a new, fancy name on something helps bring it to a new generation, then I’ll sing the praises of



micro prairies all day long. I do think that the micro moniker helps aspiring gardeners to be a bit less intimidated on doing their part to help save the environment. Saving the planet is a pretty big task, after all.

The principles are the same, no matter what you want to call it: do what you can with what you have, including space, soil and exposure;

use plants native to your ecoregion; and get rid of the sterile monoculture of turf grass — or at least reduce its foot print. Implementing design might elevate your garden from a “prairie” to a “habitat,” but the bones are still the same.

My friend, Lauren Simpson, began a pollinator habitat in the front yard of her home in Houston, and it has evolved into an amazing hub of native plants and pollinators within the urban jungle of concrete. The garden is now known as St. Julian’s Crossing, and Lauren observed 45 species of butterfly, 30 bee species and more than 25 species of wasps in 2018. At least 80 percent of the plants she uses are native, and she pays special attention to those specifically native to her ecoregion. The point here is that she is doing all of this in a relatively small space in her front yard. She actively shares her experiences on social media, so I encourage you to look her up under St. Julian’s Crossing. (Odd fact: Lauren is the person who taught me to love syrphid flies!)





**Sanguine coneflower**  
*Echinacea sanguinea*



**Downy lobelia**  
*Lobelia puberula*



**Rattlesnake master**  
*Eryngium yuccifolium*



**Narrowleaf mountain mint**  
*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*



**Coral bean**  
*Erythrina herbacea*

Whether you're planting a micro prairie or an extensive wildlife habitat, we will have the tools you need to accomplish either goal at our Garden Gala Day Plant Sale in April. We always have plants native to our piney woods ecoregion, and many of those plants overlap in the surrounding regions as well, so those of you coming from Houston, Dallas and Shreveport, Louisiana, definitely have something from which to choose.

I tend toward cool colors, so obviously those are the first plant sale recommendations I'll share. My favorite plant is the sanguine coneflower, *Echinacea sanguinea*. It's a bit daintier in appearance than purple coneflower, but it's tough as nails in the garden. I find it growing wild in deep sands of longleaf and shortleaf pine communities, where it enjoys the sun at the forest edge. It is drought tolerant, and I often find the most magnificent, green-jeweled sweat bees enjoying the nectar.

I have been blown away with downy lobelia, *Lobelia puberula*. I found a scrawny plant, again in deep sand at the forest edge, a few years ago and sowed some of its seed. With a bit of horticultural attention, i.e. potting soil, fertilizer and water, our seedlings grew into the most robust, healthy plants with massive spikes of deep blue flowers. Last fall in the nursery, we watched the monarchs choose this flower over all of the others time and again.

Shoulder crops, those that provide nectar in the early and late seasons, are immensely important, as these crops provide nourishment to pollinators emerging from hibernation in early spring, and entering hibernation or migration in late fall. Rose vervain, *Glandularia canadensis*, begins blooming in the latter part of February and offers ground-hugging foliage with big clusters of fragrant pink flowers. It's a familiar plant with a new name; you'll likely know it as verbena. Rose vervain is found in sandy soil in part shade, but will tolerate full sun given a little supplemental moisture in summer. Plants will bloom again as summer turns to fall.

Heading to the neutrals are the two

most pollinator-active plants I've grown. Rattlesnake master, *Eryngium yuccifolium*, has stiff, upright, glaucous foliage topped with branched flower clusters comprising thousands of tiny white florets. While the flower color is subtle, the plant offers great structural form in the garden and is a boon of nectar and pollen for myriad pollinators.

Narrowleaf mountain mint, *Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*, is new in my plant toolbox, but this little native has quickly made it on my top-10 plant list. Its short, stiff stems sport narrow, minty foliage and are topped with clusters of bright, white flowers. The sum of those parts lends a fine texture in the landscape, and the flowers are never without some little creature seeking nectar or pollen. This is truly a charming plant. It occurs in dry, open woods, as well as low-lying areas along roadsides. I haven't tried it, but mountain mint species can be used to make tea. Deer do not like its aromatic foliage.

I'm not a huge fan of red, but it's my coworker Jordan Cunningham's favorite color and is highly prized by hummingbirds, so I better include a redflowering beauty. Coral bean, *Erythrina herbacea*, sends up its brilliant red flower spikes in time for the spring hummingbird migration and makes a striking statement in the landscape. Nearly black seed pods form in late summer and burst open to reveal vibrant orange seeds that are stunning, albeit toxic to little humans who might decide to consume them. Cut the seed pods off before little hands find them. I like to cut back the entire plant by about half when it's done flowering to encourage more fullness in the foliage. Coral bean is tremendously heat and drought tolerant.

Even if you have a tiny yard, or simply a patio to garden on, your efforts to help pollinators are an important part of the larger conservation picture. Plus, you get pretty flowers — who doesn't want that? We'll put together some of our prairie trays again, and of course, we'll have many more prairie-friendly, pollinator-approved plants in the sale. See you April 6!



## Field Notes: Application of Education

By John Dilday

I think a quick introduction is in order for those of you who have not met me yet. I am a recent SFA graduate who studied horticulture and, as the recently hired senior garden technician, definitely the baby of the bunch. In this role, I manage large areas of the Mast Arboretum and the PNPC. However, I am not alone in this endeavor. SFA student workers help me and our other garden teams.

Having the university down the street makes finding help easy, but it does come with a slight disadvantage. Our workers are bound by their school schedules, which means so are we. Working at the PNPC has a unique flare because working around student schedules means we plan out tasks and need to stay organized. Being a student supervisor, I wanted to add to the worker experience by building off of what the students are reviewing in their classes while exposing them to concepts not taught in class.

This blend of education and work stems from my love of the outdoors and constantly wanting to further my own education in the field, as well as my strong desire to be an in-field teacher. All of my workers are SFA forestry students. Forestry has similarities with horticulture, but also has its own set of extreme complexities that differ from my school experience.

While in the gardens, my forestry students must look at the small picture, such as pruning a plant with loppers instead of using a chainsaw (though we do use chainsaws on some days, and they outdo me); labeling and mapping plants in garden spaces; or having to identify plants they might not be accustomed to seeing on a daily basis. On a good day we have lengthy, in-depth conversations about



effective management of our public garden space or, my personal favorite, effective environmental conservation in a landscape with a heavy human impact and how we can still create something healthy and helpful to the environment.

I am by no means perfect or the best teacher in the world. When we are in the forests, there are definitely concepts I do not understand, and my students fill me in. Education isn't a one-way street — it's more like a highway. There are a lot of entrances and exits and opportunities for learning, but I am not the only one who is trying to teach. I try my best to encourage the flow of ideas and knowledge so we are not just working, but also learning and driven to achieve more.

## Lemons on Logansport

By Anne Sullivan



One day in January, I was driving down King Street, where it dead-ends into Logansport Street, when something bright yellow caught my eye. In the yard directly ahead of me was a tree covered in huge yellow lemons. I stopped to take a closer look. I knew Claudine and Jack McKinney had lived in that house on Logansport Street for many years, and I

suspected Claudine had planted that tree.

I knocked on the door, and the current homeowner said she thought the tree was a cross between a grapefruit and a lemon, but she wasn't sure. She said I was welcome to have as many lemons as I wanted. I didn't have my phone with me to take pictures, so I said I would come back. The next day, I returned to take



pictures of the tree and pick up some lemons to take home. My New Year's resolution is to drink more water, and adding a squeezed lemon wedge to each glass always makes it more enjoyable than just plain water.

When I returned to Logansport, John and Karen Mast, who live next door to the lemon tree, were standing outside. I went over to explain what I was doing in their neighbor's yard. Karen asked if I was there to admire the lemon tree, and John agreed that Claudine McKinney must have planted the tree because of the age of the tree. I took pictures and collected two bags of lemons, keeping one for home and the other for work to find out what kind of lemon tree it was that was working so hard and producing such big lemons in the dead of winter.

The lemons were a little unsightly — huge, a bit overripe and dirty from rain splattering mud on them, even after being thoroughly washed and scrubbed. But still, they were amazing! A bit of research identified them as Ponderosa lemons. They have bright yellow, rough, thick peels and grow in U.S. Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zones 9 to 10. Nacogdoches lies in zone 8b. The Ponderosa, often grown as an ornamental citrus, can produce fruit as large as a grapefruit.

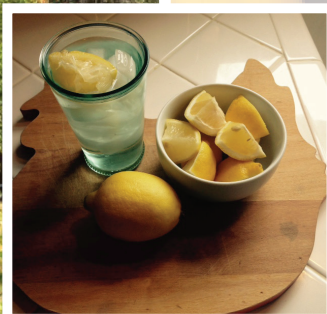
The tree itself is small with a round top, medium-thick branches with thorns, and large elliptical-to-oblong and citron-like leaves. It produces attractive purple and white flowers.

The lemons are very seedy. I'm saving the seeds to see if I can get some to germinate, and I have some to share if anyone's

interested. Research says they can be grown easily from seed and then transplanted to a larger pot or outdoors in warmer climates.

Squeezing a wedge of Ponderosa lemon into a glass of water definitely produced a more bitter taste than just regular lemon, and did in fact taste like a cross between a grapefruit and a lemon. Sometimes I combined a wedge of the Ponderosa with a wedge of a regular lemon for a better tasting glass of water. It was definitely an acquired taste, but I did enjoy it. And it proved to be an incentive to drink more water.

A tree full of giant bright-yellow lemons growing in someone's yard is definitely not something you see every day in Nacogdoches, but there's a beauty growing quite nicely over on Logansport Street.



### 'Lemon-Aid'

Besides improved hydration, drinking lemon water is a well-documented aid to many health and beauty concerns. Eight 8 oz. glasses a day are recommended for most people, but the formula is to drink half your weight in ounces of water each day.

Here's an easy way to keep track of how much lemon water you're drinking each day. Each morning, cut a whole lemon into 8 wedges and refrigerate. Add one wedge per glass as the day progresses until all lemons are gone. It's that simple. With this trick, you're on your way to a healthier, better-hydrated lifestyle.

## Smells like the Plant Sale

By Jordan Cunningham

In our first family home, my mother planted sage plants near our front door. They flourished in the North Texas summers and spilled out of the flowerbed and onto the sidewalk. When we had visitors, they would brush by the sage and bring the sweet smell of welcome to our door and into our house. My parents have since moved, but the smell of sage still makes me think of summer and our old house.

When we experience moments in our life with more than

one sense, we are more likely to remember them. Our sense of smell is most closely related to our ability to remember. In preparation for the Garden Gala Day Plant Sale, I have come across several plants that give off fragrances worthy of new memories.

One of the more obvious plants with a nice scent is lavender. This year in our plant sale, we have *Lavendula*

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**Fernleaf lavender**  
*Lavendula pinnata*

*pinnata*, the fernleaf lavender. When the leaves are crushed, you can clearly tell this plant is in the lavender family. The fernleaf lavender smell is more formal than a lavender-scented candle. This plant gives off the scent of a perfect mix of sweet lavender and a natural light perfume. Plant in a well-drained spot and use these flowers to make beautiful, fragrant arrangements.



**'Blue fortune'**  
*Agastache*

If I could describe the plant sale with a scent, it would have to be *Agastache* 'Blue fortune.' *Agastache* smells like a busy summer day. I will always associate the minty, sunny smell with moving plants to the sales floor before the big day. When I walk by and brush up against an *Agastache* I think, "Smells like the plant sale!" I'm not the only one who loves the smell of *Agastache*. Many butterflies and bees come to nectar on the soft, purple flowers.



**Pineapple sage**  
*Salvia elegans*

*Salvia elegans*, pineapple sage, is in the salvia family, but it lacks the formal, minty smell we think of with common sage. One of our student workers smelled this plant and exclaimed, "Wow! It smells like



**'Steel tower'**  
*Eucalyptus gunnii*



**Mountain mint**  
*Pycnanthemum albescens*

sour green apples!" The candy sweet smell is accompanied by watermelon-colored flowers making it a perfect addition to any summer garden.

Feeling congested? Aren't we all this time of year? When spring brings more than we bargained for and pollen attacks, eucalyptus has our backs. Scientific evidence suggests the scent of eucalyptus has decongestant effects when inhaled. Eucalyptus also is an ingredient in the all-powerful Vicks VapoRub. Maybe that's what I think of when I smell these cloudy, green leaves. Eucalyptus smells like just the medicine I need. I have heard of people hanging a branch in their shower so the steam of a hot shower takes on the scent, and they can breathe in that sweet smell of healing.

A plant with a very strong scent is *Pycnanthemum albescens*, commonly known as mountain mint. *Pycnanthemum* is in the mint family, but saying "mint" doesn't quite cover the scent this plant hits you with when you walk by. It is more like double peppermint spearmint with a hint of freshly cut grass. The flowers are not too showy, but it's the plant's scent that makes it a powerful pollinator plant. *Pycnanthemum* is the place to be if you are a bee, fly or butterfly!

## Building a Foundation for the Future

By Dr. David Creech

Dr. Dave Kulhavy, a professor in SFA's Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture and a longtime friend of our garden adventure, provided this bird's eye view of the "new" SFA Gardens horticulture facility at the PNPC.

We now have 9,000 square feet of excellent greenhouse space and a new full-sun nursery pad. The new Atlas greenhouse is full of plants and turning sunlight into plant growth



Photo by Dr. Dave Kulhavy

and then into plant sale dollars. The nursery is packed and ready to go. This facility, coupled with the nursery and one shade facility at the Mast Arboretum, has the garden poised for the future. In addition to providing a great opportunity for research, our plant-growing efforts support the salaries and fringe benefits of 2.3 staff members. I call this our program for the care and feeding of staff.





**Left:** Jessica Mattox, president of the SFA student chapter of the National Association of Interpretation, asks participants about their favorite birds.

**Right:** Using flying wild curriculum, our stations are fun and educational. Here, participants are able to learn about beak types and their special adaptations.

## Great Backyard Bird Count

The Great Backyard Bird Count of 2019 was a collaborative family day event. Many thanks to the Pineywoods Audubon Society, the SFA student chapter of the National Association of Interpretation, wildlife student volunteers, SFA Gardens and the Nacogdoches Naturally education "Dream Team."



**From left:** Birders delight in adding a purple finch to their life list. Anne Tindell shares her love for chickens with children.



**From left:** An SFA wildlife student organizes a "Match the Egg" game with children. Thanks to student volunteers like Brendan Leland, we had a wide variety of games and activities for all ages. Here, young birders play "Nature Tic-Tac-Toe" and guess the answers to various questions about our feathered friends in order to place their piece. In this case, Xs were pine cones and Os were sweet gum balls. Robin Shackelford leads an "edible bird" station — what a hoot!



## A list of the 31 species spotted during the Great Backyard Bird Count

1 American Crow	300 Cedar Waxwing	1 House Wren	10 Northern Cardinal
75 American Goldfinch	25 Chipping Sparrow	2 Red-bellied Woodpecker	2 Northern Mockingbird
1,300 American Robin	20 Dark-eyed Junco	1 Red-shouldered Hawk	60 Pine Siskin
16 Black Vulture	3 Eastern Bluebird	30 Red-winged Blackbird	1 Pine Warbler
2 Blue Jay	1 Eastern Phoebe	1 Ruby-crowned Kinglet	6 Purple Finch
1 Brown Thrasher	3 Eastern Towhee	3 Tufted Titmouse	20 White-throated Sparrow
1 Carolina Chickadee	2 Hermit Thrush	3 Turkey Vulture	8 Yellow-rumped Warbler
4 Carolina Wren	1 House Finch	10 Mourning Dove	

## My Experience as a Nacogdoches Naturally Counselor

By Alex Marquez

In my four years of being a counselor for the Nacogdoches Naturally outdoor education program, there have been many experiences for which I am grateful. The opportunity to explore outside of my daily life as a political science student really helped me put other things into consideration besides the messy world of politics. Before taking the position of counselor, I was always skeptical of being anywhere near



Alex Marquez, a political science student at SFA, worked as a counselor for SFA Gardens' afterschool program Nacogdoches Naturally. This program is fun, educational, and free for Boys and Girls Club members.

the woods, and the thought of insects made me cringe. I am a Houston native and shifting my city lifestyle with one involving "getting down and dirty" really gave me a culture shock. There was a transition period for this city boy in regard to adapting to the SFA Gardens' way of life. In order for this transition to go smoothly, I needed to prepare mentally and physically. For the first few weeks of the program, I had a miniature bottle of mosquito spray, and I insisted on wearing long-sleeve shirts. For some reason, it comforted me.

The kids in the program are from different walks of life with various demographics and cultural backgrounds that complement each other. The joy in their faces when they engage in gardening projects and environmental awareness games really made me feel as though there is more to life than the political agenda and social alignment.

The ups and downs during my time at SFA can be



summarized by one simple notion, "Nature is a great teacher." Every time the kids are dropped off at the Boys and Girls Club after our program they were excited to let someone know what they learned. I had the opportunity to immerse myself in the program and learn a thing or two about nature.

As a Hispanic American, I love seeing many different Latino kids join the program, and apparently the kids like seeing a counselor

who is Hispanic, as well. They often try to talk to me in Spanish, when appropriate. This also leads to some of the non-bilingual kids asking me for Spanish lessons. On the bus rides to and from the program, I like telling the kids in my group a Spanish word of the day. They love it. Kids are willing to learn anything you are willing to teach them with enthusiasm, and they always pick up the concepts quickly. For instance, many of the kids who start off in the program do not eat vegetables on a regular basis, but in the program, we give the kids a vegetable or fruit to show them the benefits of healthy eating.

Nacogdoches Naturally is a program that is fun, educational, and free for Boys and Girls Club members. We set up a number of kid and family friendly events. This ultimately will lead to social concern for community involvement and environmental awareness for future generations.



## Taxodium 'Oaxaca Child' Finds a Home at Aggieland

By Dr. David Creech

One of our SFA Gardens introductions has found a home in the Leach Teaching Garden, which is a new garden and phase one of a \$60 million project at Texas A&M University. The Gardens at Texas A&M University is a long-needed resource for Texas, and plant enthusiasts are excited about this development. It will be a huge part of our mission to find plants ready for the challenges of a changing climate and evolving horticulture.

Since I'm an Aggie ('70 and '78), I can't tell you what a surprise it was to learn that one of our seedlings from the largest *Taxodium* in the world has a place in this new garden. The El Árbol del Tule is located at the Church of Our Lady built by the Spanish more than 400 years ago in Santa María del Tule in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. I've been to the mother tree several times, and Janet and I spent our

honeymoon in Oaxaca.

As part of a mission with Mexican, Chinese and American scientists, I chose a select seedling and got graft wood. The seedling rapidly grew at SFA, and it didn't take long to realize it easily roots. We named it 'Oaxaca Child.'

Joseph Johnson, director of horticulture for the gardens, told me it was planted in February 2018 in Aggieland. Botanically, we agree with Dr. Mike Arnold, TAMU horticultural sciences department, that the Montezuma cypress is *Taxodium distichum var. mexicanum*, a close relative of our Southern USA bald cypress.

The Montezuma cypress lives for thousands of years, can become huge, has no knees, is relatively disease and insect resistant, has a tendency to be evergreen, and is generally quite tolerant of salt and alkalinity.

# Upcoming Events

### MARCH 30: LITTLE PRINCESS TEA PARTY

Enjoy tea party seatings at 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. The theme of this year's gathering for mothers, grandmothers and friends to share with their little princesses, ages 3-10, is "The Heart of a Princess." The event costs \$35 per person, and reservations can be made online at [sfagardens.sfasu.edu](http://sfagardens.sfasu.edu).



### APRIL 6: GARDEN GALA DAY PLANT SALE

Shop for a variety of Texas-tough perennials, annuals, ornamental grasses, natives, trees and shrubs from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the PNPC, located at 2900 Raguet St. Visit [sfagardens.sfasu.edu](http://sfagardens.sfasu.edu) two weeks before the sale for a list of available plants.



### APRIL 11: THERESA AND LES REEVES LECTURE SERIES

Hear Daniel Cunningham from Texas A&M Agrilife Research in Dallas present on how to "Eat the Yard: A Guide to Edible Landscape Plants."



### APRIL 27: BREAKFAST ON THE FARM

Join SFA agriculture students for breakfast at SFA's Todd Agricultural Research Center. During this free event, you can meet the animals, take a hayride, explore and learn about agriculture through hands-on activities from 9 a.m. to noon. Call (936) 468-3705 for a free ticket.



### MAY 9: THERESA AND LES REEVES LECTURE SERIES

Listen to Marc Pastorak, prairie activist and horticulturist from Covington, Louisiana, present, "The Prairie-Inspired Garden – Fun with Seed!"



### MAY 11: PHOTOGRAPHING FLOWERS

Join Dr. Tom Willis, award-winning member of the Nacogdoches Photography Club, to learn the basics of photographing flowers and editing images from 9 a.m. to noon at the PNPC. Digital cameras will be available to borrow or bring your own digital camera or cellphone. The cost is \$25 for SFA Gardens members and \$35 for nonmembers.



### JUNE 13: THERESA AND LES REEVES LECTURE SERIES

Enjoy Allen Owings, horticulture consultant from Hammond, Louisiana, elaborate on, "Crimes Against Horticulture – Common Improper Practices."



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The free lecture series events will begin at 7 p.m. in the Brundrett Conservation Education Building. A drawing for plants from SFA Gardens will follow.

For more information, contact SFA Gardens at (936) 468-4129 or [sfagardens@sfasu.edu](mailto:sfagardens@sfasu.edu).



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WITH US.

Stephen F. Austin State University  
Arthur Temple College of  
Forestry and Agriculture  
P.O. Box 13000  
Nacogdoches, TX 75962  
(936) 468-4404  
sfagardens@sfasu.edu  
sfagardens.sfasu.edu  
Facebook: SFA Gardens

Arthur Temple College of  
Forestry and Agriculture  
STEPHEN F. AUSTIN  
STATE UNIVERSITY



*“But each spring a gardening instinct, sure as  
the sap rising in the trees, stirs within us.”*

– Lewis Gantt

