THE Garden Grapevine

The Official Newsletter of the
St. Johns Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve

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Letter from the Founder

Happy Autumn! Our young Garden is making great progress… One only needs to visit and compare it with previous visits to see the changes! Yet, we are going through some growing pains. Additions, expansions, improvements, new signage, new benches, new plants, and maintenance all require funding and volunteers.

Our distance from urban areas makes it more difficult to acquire both. Why is that? In part, it is because we are very young and still trying to get on our feet financially, and most grants require that businesses be open for at least 5 years and already have a relatively strong income flow.

Thus, at this time, donations and memberships are our main source of income, and we could really use your help. Won't you please consider donating or becoming a Member today? Or renew your membership if you already are a Member. And we're always seeking new "Green Thumbs"!

Dr. John Rossi

Founder and Resident Biologist

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Latest Happenings at the Garden

We are excited to announce our brick fundraising campaign to assist in developing the recently acquired 5.5 acres adjacent to the current property. A large portion of property will be preserved; however, we plan to build a new welcome center with a classroom/meeting room, restrooms, a lab and a gift shop. The funds from this brick campaign will contribute to making our expansion a reality. Prices start at $100 for a 4" x 8" brick. It's easy to order. Go to www.fundraisingbrick.com/sjbgnp/ or contact the Garden's office at 904-540-3294 or email: gardenfundraiser26@gmail.com

The last three months there has been a whirlwind of activity at the Garden! Our young Garden continues to go through growing pains as it looks to the future and recovers from a record cold snap. Almost every day during the last three months, new plants are purchased, donated, or grown here, and are planted or artfully potted in the Garden. The lush verdant growth has largely returned to the Garden, but like the growth that occurs after a volcano or tidal wave, it is different. Those who haven't visited for a while are shocked and impressed by the changes. New species have been added, others recover in place and some were never affected by the cold. Almost all of the species of palms are still present here, but some have been replanted in areas more protected from the cold. Some of those lost in certain areas that are not easily protected have been replaced by more cold hardy species. **In fact, our Garden still boasts one of the largest collections of palms (approximately 500 species, or types) in the State, and therefore, in the eastern United States!**



A silvery bottomed Root Spine Palm, *Crysophila warscewiczii*, from Central America proved it could handle the cold!

In addition, many other tropical plants are being added that can handle our occasional cold, such as bamboo. The Garden has added over ten more species

of bamboo, including some very rare and beautiful types that are striped, or have unusual colors as they mature, including black, red, or blue culms(shoots)!



A Candy Cane Bamboo shows off its stripes, even at this young age!

New Cycads, a very ancient group of palm-like conifers, have been added to various locations in the Garden. Cycads are sometimes called dinosaur plants, because they were around during the age of the dinosaurs, and with palms, they are the epitome of tropical landscape plants! In fact, they add a unique structural appearance to a garden that is unmatched by any other plant. Two beauties just added are the Eastern Cape Cycad, *Encephalartos villosus*, and a Mexican Horned Cycad, *Ceratozamia robusta*. And multiple *Dioons* have also been added along Tropical Trail.



The Eastern Cape Cycad, *Encephalartos villosus*, is seen in the African Area of the Garden.

Furthermore, the signage is now shifting to something very unlike that seen in many other botanical gardens. It is what we call "connective signage". This refers to the fact that the new signs connect the plant being viewed to something else, such as an animal that occurs with it, an unusual place, use, or even a famous person! It brings the plants being viewed to life, so to speak. Otherwise, it would just be another pretty plant to look at as you walked by. Indeed, some biologists have referred to animals or plants that are not in their environment as dead, and this is an effort to really bring the plant to life in the minds of the visitors. But these signs are expensive to produce. Each one can cost upwards of $40, so they are being added slowly. The greatest concentration of these signs is along "Fan Palms of the World Trail" right now, but they are gradually showing up elsewhere.



Our signs often connect our plants with animals that are found in the same habitat.

In addition to new plants and awesome signage, the Garden has added many new statues and pretty pots here and there throughout the Garden. Volunteer Green Thumb Elaine Prisby leads the Garden in her potting skills and they show up everywhere. The statues include a deer with her fawn, a panda bear munching on some bamboo, and some owls! Of course, new and old Gnomes alike are constantly being added as they are donated or purchased.



A Panda Bear pot that was painted by Dr. Rossi is seen near the entrance to the Garden. New pots are added all the time, and volunteer artists are always welcome!

One of the new and exciting things for the kids at the Garden is the **Zombie Velociraptor** that growls at you as you walk by. At 7 feet tall, with its toothsome jaws

opening and closing as it growls, it is pretty frightening! Come check it out along Tropical Trail near the Cycad Area where the other dinosaurs are located.



The Zombie Velociraptor is a Halloween addition but will be converted to a regular looking velociraptor afterwards (like we know what a regular one looked like)!

Once Halloween is over, Dr. Rossi said he is looking forward to turning it into a regular looking velociraptor (whatever we imagine a regular one to look like) by using foam and paint. But we have gotten so used to hearing the eerie dinosaur call resonating throughout parts of the Garden that we won't change that! However, we will put warning signs up to make people aware, so the dinosaur won't frighten pets or young children, and we may keep the sound turned off during the morning hours on weekdays.

The Boy Scouts came to the rescue! Troop 243 visited the Garden on Saturday, September 5th and attacked the weeds on Silver Hill, trimmed plants along the Nature Preserve Trail, and mulched out several areas! Wow! Thanks guys! You did an awesome job!

Meanwhile, progress is finally being made on the Bromeliad Mountain Waterfall. Friend and fellow animal lover, Justin Miller, has been advising on and designing the waterfall to be built along Tropical Trail. Another friend of the Garden, Mark Elliott, who is an electrician, ran power out to the area in preparation for the waterfall. The rocks have been purchased and will be brought to the Garden very soon. Volunteer Nicholas Longo worked hard to clear and begin designing and planting some of the area surrounding the waterfall to be built. It should be beautiful!

We have added a **new wooden swing** to the North side of the Blue Lagoon and are also adding new metal park benches in other areas.



The new swing on the North side of the Blue Lagoon provides another restful place to enjoy the birds and the breeze at the Garden.

Our Garden finally has a **flagpole** out near the entrance! It was a longtime coming, and Old Glory helps to welcome all our visitors.



The new flagpole near the front sign greets visitors.

There is a **new informational Kiosk** that talks about the history of the land and has many relics that have been found on the property. Old Coke and Pepsi bottles, hub caps, agricultural artifacts and other things are on display in the kiosk opposite the Hope Oak in the center of the Garden.



The Kiosk across from the Hope Oak shows many artifacts found on the land upon which the Garden now exists.

New plants continue to arrive in the Garden nearly every week. Quite a few **Brazilian Red Cloak Plants** have been placed in and around different areas. Several are in the courtyard, and others have been planted along Tropical Trail. We are hoping to see their beautiful red flowers appear late in the Fall or early Winter.

New species of schefflera continue to be added, including the gorgeous *Schefflera schizophylla* from Indonesia. **New fern trees** and other

species of ferns have been planted as well. As mentioned above, **many new species of non-invasive (clumping) bamboo** have been added, including some very rare and beautiful types with yellow stripes! New and rare palms continue to arrive as well. Five small **Japanese Fan Palms *Livistona boninensis***, have been planted and a sign placed near them tells what is special about them. Quite a few small **Royal Palms** of multiple species have been planted. These include several **Guantanamo Bay Royals** *Roystonea maisiana*, **Purple Royals** *R. violacea*, **Puerto Rican Royals** *R. borinquena*, **Caribbean Royals** *R. oleracea*, and **the latest, Fakahatchee Florida Royals** *R. regia*. Of course, the Garden already had quite a few large specimens of the standard **Cuban Royal Palms** *R. regia* on display but these latest two are considered special because they are known to have been native to Florida for a long time!



Adult Royal Palm recovering from last year's cold!

So, what is so special and interesting about Royal Palms? Well, firstly, they are absolutely one of the most gorgeous and stately palms on the planet! There is a reason they call them Royal! You may have seen them on your travels around South Florida. But did you know there were many species of Royal Palms? There are 11 different species recognized! And our Garden has five of them, as listed above! There have been many arguments about whether the ones found in Florida are a different species from the most common ones found in Cuba, but recently palm experts have lumped those two together. However, the ones found in the Fakahatchee Strand State Park and Preserve near Venice, Florida appear to be true long-time Florida natives, and that is why Dr. Rossi was so excited to bring two small ones back to our Garden. He hopes to have them on display with a sign by the time you are reading this!

The Green Thumbs worked through much of the intense heat in July and then took a deserved break in August! Our Non-Profit Garden is so thankful for all of their efforts and **could not** exist without the efforts of its Volunteers! If you would like to help, we could sure use you! And if you don't like to garden, and just want to meet lots of nice people, we could use folks who want to help in the Office and Gift Shop area, greeting people and checking them in!

In addition to everything else new happening at the Garden, some new Board Members have been elected, and some new officers. The outgoing Officers have worked very hard for years and donated much of their own money and supplies to help the Garden grow! But in every organization, as in nature, things change and that is a good thing! President and founder Dr. John Rossi said he would prefer to concentrate on his scientific duties, but he will remain on the Board and continue to give tours and help the Garden in any way he can. He is also currently writing a book for homeowners, landscapers and collectors! Vice President Jane Villa-Lobos, another super hard worker, has stepped down as well but will remain on as a Volunteer. The new Officers will be sworn in next month and introduced in the next issue.

Volunteer Spotlight

This time around, the spotlight is on two great volunteers, because they always work together, and have for a long time! Bob and Sally Maloney come every Thursday morning and work wherever they are needed, trimming, cleaning, and planting. They have recently moved here from Ohio, where Bob was actually a Mayor!

COMING EVENTS

Two Big Events are coming up soon! The Fall Plant Sale is coming up on *Saturday, October 10th!* And the Three-Year Anniversary will be held on *Saturday, November 7th!*

The Fall Plant Sale on Saturday, October 10th is always a big hit and well attended. Beautiful flowering plants, bromeliads and rare palms and cycads, as well as lots of garden arts, accessories and other things will be on display for the gardeners who want cool stuff at great prices, and they will be especially good if you are a member! The fantastic strumming ***Sue Tice will be playing her fiddle/violin from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm*** to enhance your Garden experience. We love Sue's variety!

And bring the kids because the exciting ***Wild Wonders Animal Show will be back with their award winning 1 hour program! It begins at 1:30 pm*** so arrive early enough to shop and then take a break to eat and watch the show, or you can shop more while the kids are at the show! **Food Vendors** will be on site also, so get ready for some great food!



Wild Wonders is coming back, and it is always a huge hit with the kids (and adults love it too)!

The **Three-Year Anniversary on Saturday, November 7th** will be a great opportunity to see the Garden in all of its glory, right before Old Man Winter comes back! Come on in and renew your Membership to see the great changes and additions! Many flowering plants will be in full bloom then, and the tropical plants always seem super-lush at this time of the year. If you haven't seen the Garden for a while, this will be a great time to come and see it. The Anniversary will also feature vendors of all different kinds, including stuff for everyone. There will be **live entertainment** as well, with strumming ***Sue Tice coming back for an encore performance from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm,*** and the ever popular ***Skin and Bonz Band will return with their lively mixture of rock and country starting around 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm!*** They even do a few square dances and teach folks how to square dance! The kids love it! And **Food Trucks** will be ready to serve you a tasty lunch!

Two other events are coming up as well: **Frightivities and Ghouloring, a celebration of Halloween for the kids**, is being held on ***Saturday, October 24th, from 11am to 3:30 pm!*** There will be Halloween Bingo, Build a Bat, Monster, Vampire and other activities, including some ghostly coloring.

A **Singles Meet and Greet for ages 40 and up** will be held at the Garden on ***Saturday, November 14th, from 5 pm to 9 pm.*** We will be serving oysters on the half shell and chicken wings. There will also be a tequila and tequila wine tasting available.

Plant of the Month
By: Libby Leudeke

Made in the Shade- Caladiums



Caladiums come in a huge variety of colors.

As many of you know, growing colorful plants in the shady part of your yard is quite difficult, but I have the cure for you! They are called caladiums and they come in a variety of color combinations. They grow by tubers and will light up dark corners for many months! They love our tropical temperatures and humidity and prefer indirect light. They will wilt however, if we go into a drought, and they may need watering occasionally during those times.

Like many other plants, they prefer loose, well-draining soil. They are hardy perennials in zones 9 – 12, but they will go dormant in the winter. So even if they seem to disappear, expect them to come back in May to present a colorful display all over again! One thing to remember though, is that they are toxic, so if you get sap on your hands,

don't rub your eyes or touch your mouth without first washing your hands with soap and water. There had to be a disclaimer somewhere!

But for long term colorful beauty, they are a must. Come check out the many colors displayed throughout the Garden and discover your favorite!

Animal Sightings

As the weather begins to cool off and some rain finally comes to end this drought, the animal activity is increasing. Birds of many different kinds are heard throughout the Garden and Nature Preserve. Choruses of frogs and toads are heard on and off through the night and sometimes even during the daytime. Lizards are out looking for insects and snakes are out looking for lizards! Several of our beautiful Eastern Blue Striped Garter Snakes have been seen down in the Nature Preserve. Two stunningly beautiful Corn Snakes have been seen here recently; one of them was crossing the exit drive across the top of the metal gate! The Corn Snakes in this area are recognized by herpetologists as some of the most beautiful in the State due to their brilliant orange and brick red patterns, and occasionally mistaken for Copperheads.



A Hastings Corn Snake found on top of the gate! The Corn Snakes in this area are famous for their brilliant orange and red pattern!

A Belted Kingfisher was seen taking advantage of the low water levels before the rains, to catch fish in the shallow water. And unfortunately, so did an otter, who caught a large grass carp one night recently. But now that the water levels are returning to normal, the fish have a little better chance of escaping. Other large predatory birds have been observed in the last month, including Bald Eagles, Hawks, Great White/Blue Herons, Green Herons, Ibis, and Limpkins. A young Turkey was also spotted at the edge of the Nature Preserve. Indeed, all of the animal sightings remind us regularly that our Garden is not just a garden, but also a Nature Preserve, and that the hardwood deciduous forest that dominates it is a unique and rich habitat! Immerse yourself in our beautiful Nature Preserve for a relaxing escape from the stress of our modern world. Hear nothing but the birds, cicadas and the trickling stream!



A peaceful spot in the Nature Preserve where cypress roots have created a natural waterfall.



A Green Heron hunts for food among the rocks around the Blue Lagoon.

Donations

Dear Friends of the Garden, Your Garden needs your help to survive. The intense heat of this Summer (August was the hottest month in recorded history) has reduced admissions during that time and caused a shortfall of funds. **IF YOU HAVE EVER CONSIDERED MAKING A DONATION, NOW IS THE BEST TIME!** Our little tropical paradise is so young, it is hard for us to even apply for grants yet. So, your donations are absolutely critical to keeping us up and running. Please make a tax-deductible donation today. And either renew your Membership, become a Member, or gift someone with one! And the more Members we have, the better the chance we can apply for grants! Honestly, this is a critical time for the Garden.

And don't forget the **brick fundraiser** to support building the new welcome center and its amenities. To order an engraved brick go to www.fundraisingbrick.com/sjbgnp/ or contact the office.

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation, please call us at (904) 540-3294, from 11 am to 4 pm on Thursdays thru Mondays, email us at info@stjohnsbotanicalgarden.org or make a donation at www.stjohnsbotanicalgarden.org/donate . You could also send a check to our physical address at: St. Johns Botanical Garden, 8310 County Road 13 S., Hastings, FL 32145.

AND REMEMBER, YOU HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

