

Letter From The Editor

Welcome to all of our new members and volunteers. The Garden Grapevine is sent out bimonthly to our members and volunteers to keep them up to date on the happenings at the garden. The newsletter not only features the latest news, but also coming events and spotlights on volunteers and their projects. The goal is to give everyone the opportunity to get involved and stay involved as well as get to know some of the people behind the scenes. We encourage our board members, staff, advisors, and volunteers to contribute articles about their garden related achievements as well, and we look forward to expanding the newsletter to include new additions, photographs, plants of the month, and animal sightings in the garden and nature preserve.

Dr. John Rossi

Founder and Resident Biologist



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Native wild azaleas bloom in the garden every March

Latest Happenings At The Garden

Incredible things are happening! Have you seen our gift shop lately? New volunteer, retired former nursery manager Sue Wilson, has brought her retail skills to our little corner gift shop, and it shows! New items have been arriving almost on a daily basis, and Sue is artfully rearranging the merchandise. Unbelievably, some of the new merchandise sold on the very first day it arrived! Meanwhile, Jane Villa Lobos has been working the nursery hard, labeling plants and weeding them, and nursery sales are beginning to increase. Attendance is steadily increasing as the word gets out about the garden, which is now entering its 6th month of existence. Private tours to garden clubs from

nearly all of the surrounding counties have been occurring, including those from Baker, Clay and Putnam Counties. Several photography clubs have visited as well!

A whole new area is being opened soon: The North Florida Vegetable and Herb Garden! This project is being designed and built by the dynamic duo of Kelley and Vic Barrigar! They have taken over the old vegetable garden area near the trail coming back from the nature preserve and are working hard to bring it back to life. Kelley's excitement is contagious and we are definitely excited to see her garden spring to life. She has mentioned using the three sisters

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technique that the native Americans (Cherokee and Iroquois) used to employ to grow gardens, using corn to support the beans, which fix nitrogen in the soil and squash to stabilize the corn stalks and help to retain soil moisture. Kelley and Vic will be selling some of their produce and other products at the garden, and a percentage of their proceeds will go towards helping to support the botanical garden.



The gorgeous Diamond Joey palm steals the show in the Asian plant area!

Meanwhile, new plants continue to arrive at the SJBGNP, including many varieties we have not seen in this area before. These include the Japanese Andromeda *Pieris japonica*, a gorgeous cold hardy shrub with oodles of drooping bell shaped white flowers in late winter or early spring, and reddish bronze new leaf growth in the summer and fall! The variety we acquired is called the "Mountain Snow" Pieris, and it is native to China. Of course, new palms are continuing to be added to many areas of the garden, and perhaps the most exciting new palm addition, is the gorgeous Diamond Joey Palm *Johannesteijsmannia altifrons* just added to the Asian palm area. The "Joey" part of the name is due to the fact that no one could pronounce the full scientific name, and the diamond part of the name is due to the spectacular diamond shaped leaves! The garden has had several specimens for years, but this is the

largest of the bunch, and a wonderful specimen! Another exciting addition is a *Pseudophoenix lediniana*, the Giant Cherry Palm from southwestern Haiti, which was just planted in a hot sunny spot near the exit drive, joining its cousins, the *P. sargentii* and *P. vinifera*, the Buccaneer Palm and the Cherry Palm respectively. The young plant is only about two feet tall, but it already is starting to show that glaucous blue color that makes these palms so attractive! This is reportedly the fastest growing palm in the genus, so come watch our new baby grow! Members of this genus have proven fairly cold tolerant, and are considered by many to be the most salt tolerant palms in the world! By the way, these would be great palms to adopt for your children or grandchildren!

Recent Past Events

The Lover's Picnic, our version of Valentine's Day in the garden was postponed due to heavy rain on February 18th, but was well attended on the following Sunday, the 24th. It was wonderful watching couples wandering through the garden together, or sitting together on benches and picnic tables throughout the garden, sharing the music of Sue Tice on fiddle and harp as well as the beauty of nature in the garden and nature preserve.

On March 3rd, the Sunshine Soiree was cancelled due to a lack of sunshine, unfortunately, and moved to the 10th, where it was well attended! The weather was beautiful, and a good size crowd enjoyed Mike Rossi, of Wild Wonders doing his famous animal show. Even the adults in the crowd enjoyed the show, and the kids were also entertained by Cathleen and Company, and had their faces painted by Michelle of Magic Mirror Face Painting!

Spotlight On Volunteers

So many great new volunteers have come to the garden lately, and we will introduce all of them at one time or another, but we must stop and pay tribute to one of our first, Libby Luedeke! Libby showed up early in the development of the garden and became one of our hardest working volunteers. She shows up early in the morning when she can, in spite of living in Oak Hill, and that is one long drive! She has become the veritable "rock" of the garden volunteers, working through heat, humidity, and at times, mosquitoes to attack the vines, weeds and other things that a garden needs done. Once, when planting a palm in the courtyard area, she ran into a sizeable root. Did that stop her? No way! Libby simply got an axe from the tool shed and chopped her way through it! She also became our Secretary when we needed her. Recently, she mentioned that she will be having to step down from that position due to the declining health of her mother, who requires more assistance. But she said that she will still volunteer in the garden when she can. Thank you Libby! This garden wouldn't be the same without you. Another super volunteer, Kit Schiller, has been voted in by the board as our new Secretary, starting on June 1st.

The Garden Needs More Volunteers Like Libby! There is so much to do. If you love nature, you qualify; join our family. Come on a regular basis and make new friends. Or bring a friend and bond over the shared experience! We need everything from weed pullers, to engineers and professional botanists! Are you a carpenter, plumber, electrician, or mason? Do you like painting or crafts? Are you a teacher desiring to teach a class? Are you a master garden-

Volunteers *continued from page 2*

er who has a desire to design and build a native plant garden? Maybe you like to trail blaze and explore the wilderness. We need a volunteer or volunteers to scout out the wilderness area of the garden to determine where the trails will go! Bring your machete! And remember that you will have to ford the creek, so prepare to get wet! Whatever your special skill is, YOUR garden needs your help!

Right now, Dana Wiest needs help pulling invasive weeds in the nature preserve!

If you think that you might be interested in becoming a garden volunteer, please contact us at 904 553 7563.



This young velociraptor was spotted in the cycad area of the garden!

Animal Sightings *(seriously now)*

Beautiful birds are visiting the garden right now on their way north from their winter retreats. Robins, Goldfinches, American Redstarts, Scarlet Tanagers, and warblers too numerous to count have descended upon the garden and are singing noisily! We have also spotted two more cop-



Robins and many other birds are passing through the garden this spring!

perheads, which are believed to have been accidentally introduced into this area by agricultural activity, such as in bales of hay, or potted plants being brought in from other areas where those snakes occur naturally.

Upcoming Events

Times and events are subject to change due to weather conditions or other unforeseen circumstances. Other events may crop up as well. Check our Facebook page or website regularly to find out when other events will be scheduled or listed vents changed.

Saturday, April 13: Armed Forces Appreciation Day – Mr. Terry Scott, Master Chief of the Navy MCPON (USN Retired), will be speaking, followed by a scavenger hunt by Cathleen & Company at 1:00 pm; Face Painting from 11:00 am-1:00 pm; WILD WONDERS Animal Show at 2:00 pm; LIVE MUSIC BY HIGHWAY 100 from 12:00-2:00 pm; food vendors will be present.

Sunday, May 5: The May Day Bash – 12:00 noon Scavenger Hunt with Cathleen and Company! WILD WONDERS ANIMAL SHOW starts at 1:00 pm followed by the Family Face Painting; LIVE MUSIC BY THE TAIL DRAGGERS from 11:00 am-1:00 pm; with many delicious food vendors.

Sunday, May 26 Sunday: Fertilizer Expert Keith Santner – A presentation on what to use, when to use it and how to fertilize plants in North Florida! Time to be announced on our website and social media sites.

Donations

We'd like to give a big thanks to Dana Wiest for her generous donation! She has become our first Nature Preserve Fellow, and now our very first Nature Preserve Docent! Her first task has been to try to control the invasive plants in our Nature Preserve and she needs help! If you want to volunteer to help Dana, please contact us at the volunteer number listed above. Such donations of money and time make a huge impact on us!

Right now is a critical time for the garden! While we are off to a great start, we haven't (yet) received any help from the county or state, and the first year is critical for eligibility with grants and/or funding. The garden needs resources to build permanent bathrooms, add signage, create an education center, acquire additional land, hire full time botanists, etc.

If you would like to make a donation, please call us at (904) 553-7563 or talk to one of our staff when you visit the garden, or make a donation on line at our website at <https://www.stjohnsbotanicalgarden.org/donate/>

To make an announcement or contribute an article, please send it to Palmcabinman@gmail.com (please keep your articles concise, since space is limited).

AND REMEMBER, YOU HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE!



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