

## Letter From The Editor

Welcome to all our new members and volunteers! The Garden Grapevine is sent out bimonthly to our members, volunteers, and donors 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.

## Dr. John Rossi

Founder and Resident Botanist



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## Latest Happenings At The Garden

Wow! Where does one start? There has been an explosion of new volunteers at the Garden! Everyone is working so hard trimming, weeding, watering, cleaning up piles, planting, potting, staffing booths at area events, labeling plants, etc... so it's going to be very difficult to pick a Volunteer of the Month this time around! 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 Barigar**! 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 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.

**Sue Wilson** is continuing her magic in the gift shop, with new products arriving and sales increasing steadily!

**Jane Villa-Lobos** made more progress in the Nursery, and has been donating many beautiful plants to the Garden, as well as identifying and labeling plants.

**Elaine and Henry Prisby** have been incredibly busy attacking the

*continues on page 2*

## Latest Happenings

*continued from page 1*

vines and trimming back overgrown plants in the Island Palm area and many other areas in the Garden.

**Tracy Hines** seems to have adopted the Tropical Trail area as her own, and comes regularly to work on the weeds there, and is now helping remove invasive plants in the Preserve.

**Amy Kalmbacher** is working every Monday with Elaine planting like crazy to keep up with Doc's great plant buys!

**Carla McCargo** spent an entire day watering, which our garden needs desperately during this dry season.

New volunteer **David Powell** has joined the regular crew and immediately went to work up front, cleaning and digging around the electric gate to make it easier for it to open and close.

**Joseph Morris** continues to come to plant, trim, water and do repairs. We love seeing him show up!

**Dr. Susan Brenner** has joined our volunteer core and has begun coming to help around the garden. In addition to "getting in the weeds," it is hoped that Dr. Brenner will help us set up educational programs for children and help us acquire grants to do so! Welcome Dr. Brenner.

Lastly, long time volunteer, and super energetic **Bobbi Kantor** has been coming to help with field trips on days that we are closed and staffing booths at numerous events around town. Thank you Bobbi!

And thanks to all of our volunteers. We couldn't do it without them!



## Come Join Us!

**Come join our family of volunteers. Visit the garden and speak with Office Manager Kaitlyn Fair and/or Volunteer Coordinator Kit Schiller.**

Our Secretary and Volunteer Coordinator Kit Schiller has been interviewing new volunteers, discovering their skills and talents. Their orientation includes a tour to familiarize them with the garden and learning what they would like to contribute. It looks like we are truly blessed. There are many talented people willing to come love our garden!!

Vice President **Tony Molinaro** has been installing new irrigation lines and running electricity into the new Community Events Center Room. The room will feature bulletin boards with area events and businesses, as well as recent news and animal or plant news from the Garden. It will also be a place where visitors can get a quick cup of coffee, or when it gets hot, an ice cream!

A special thanks goes out to a longtime friend of the garden, **Becky Noth**, who frequently sends us plants for trial in the garden. The amazing thing is that Becky lives 2000 miles away, in Arizona, and is a former longtime Arboretum worker herself! Many of the plants she sends are battle tested in a hot dry climate, and in theory would be great drought resistant, cold tolerant and successful water conserving plants here. The big question of course, is will they be able to handle our humidity? But thank you again Becky!

President **John Rossi** has been adding new sun loving palms to the return trail from the Nature Preserve as well as breaking ground in the native plant area. The palm lined trail features the world's slowest growing palm, the Haitian Cherry Palm *Pseudophoenix ekmanii* (the ten-year-old palm is only 1 foot tall!),

and the Vulcano European Fan Palm, found only on Vulcano Island south of Spain, among many other rare or unusual palms that love hot, sunny places! In fact, he has proposed that we name that trail, "Sunshine Trail!" And the new Native Plant Area has its first four non-palm additions, including paw paw, American fringe tree, swamp azalea and Carolina allspice, all native to Florida, but found in other areas as well. All of them have interesting histories and either medicinal uses or have edible fruits.

In addition to those plants mentioned above, the garden's first ginkgo tree is being planted. Ginkgo trees are living fossils, unchanged since the Jurassic Period, over 200 million years ago! They are also very long-lived trees, with some trees living for thousands of years! Furthermore, they have medicinal uses that go back to ancient times. They are native to China, Japan, and Korea, and are deciduous trees, losing their leaves in the winter, but turning a brilliant yellow in the fall. Come check it out at the garden!

## Recent Past Events

On April 13th, the Garden sponsored **Armed Forces Appreciation Day**. The event was well attended but the cloudy weather curbed attendance a bit. Master Chief of the Navy Mr. Terry Scott gave a great speech, and was followed by presentations from Wild Wonders and the band "Highway 100," and we also had tasty food trucks, so a lovely day in all!

Sunday, April 21st we had a wonderful musical performance by **Skin and Bonz**. With a bass, a banjo and a fiddle, what else could we do but get up and dance?!? So fun.

On Sunday, May 5th, the **May Day Bash** featured something for everyone. **Wild Wonders Animal Show**

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## Recent Past Events

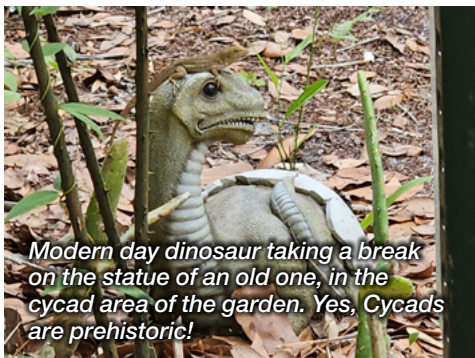
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made an appearance and thrilled children and adults alike. Mike showed the crowd why he has become so popular around Northern Florida in the last 20 years! **Jimmy's BBQ Truck** prepared delicious food, and our face painter made some little ones very happy! The "**Tail Dragger's Band**" (former pilots) played their homespun brand of bluegrass music until Mother Nature interrupted what otherwise began as a beautiful day with a sudden thunderstorm! And two hours later, the sun was shining again! It is Florida, so it's routine!

The area garden clubs have been visiting us regularly throughout the last two months! During that time, we have had visits from the **Putnam County Master Gardeners**, the **Clay County Master Gardeners**, **Baker County Master Gardeners**, the **Jacksonville Arboretum Gardeners**, and the **Washington Oaks Park** volunteers! The **St. Augustine Photography Club** also came for a field trip, and many stayed for a long time after the tour was over, taking lots of pictures of the many beautiful flowers in the garden.

## Animal Sightings

The bird species count has now passed the 100 mark, as five new species have been discovered in the park this past active month! **Craig Van Boskirk**, avid birdwatcher, and member of the Audubon Society, has been



## 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, May 18: Nature Immersion Walks** – 10:00 am-Noon. Register at: [www.myresilientnature.com](http://www.myresilientnature.com). Advance registration required. Fee \$40 (includes admission to the Garden).

**Saturday, May 18: Hugelkultur Gardening Techniques** – 10:30-11:30 am. Fee \$60 (includes admission into the Botanical Garden). **Kelly and Vic Cabrera** continue work on our North Florida Vegetable Garden/Teaching Garden using Hugelkultur raised beds to achieve maximum success. Their garden is already producing vegetables and drawing a lot of attention. Understand sustainable horticultural practices to feed your family and support your local environment! For more information, contact Kelley at (904) 377-0788, or make reservations at: [vstarfitnessgroup.com/reservations](http://vstarfitnessgroup.com/reservations).

steadily adding birds to the list this spring, and strongly suspects that the Garden's Nature Preserve will become a birding hot spot! The list, which is constantly being updated, is posted on the bulletin board in the main entrance. The latest birds added to the list include: the worm eating warbler, oven-bird, great crested flycatcher, yellow billed cuckoo, and limpkin. Swallow tailed kites and wild turkeys have been confirmed, and the European starling has also been observed.

**Sunday, May 26: Gardener Appreciation Day (aka The Great Green Gardener Gathering And Plant Sale)** – starting at 10:00 am. The St. John's Botanical Garden is proud to present **Mr. Keith Santner**, a world renown fertilizer expert, speaking on two topics: at 10:00 am he'll address *Fertilizing Plants In The Ground* and then at 11:00 am he'll address *Fertilizing Plants In Containers*.

Lunch – bring your own food and drinks; food truck available.

At 1:00 pm St. John's Botanical Garden President, **Dr. John Rossi** presents: *The Latest & Greatest New Palms For Northern Florida: Battle Tested Tropical Plants You Will Want To Add To Your Garden!*

**And if that wasn't enough to get you motivated, the Garden will hold its first ever –**

## Spring Plant Sale!

Rare palms, cactuses, cycads, bromeliads, all at reduced prices! Even common plants are available in smaller sizes and much cheaper than at the big box stores! Come check it out!

As the weather warms up, a number of reptiles have been seen around the Garden. The speedy little six-lined racerunners have been showing up running around the hot, dry areas of the garden. Yellow rat snakes have also been moving around, beginning their spring hunt for rats, mice, and young squirrels, as well as Black Racers. We also have a cheerful family of skinks that have lived around the Barn area for generations now!

*continues on page 4*

## Plant Of The Month

by Libby Luedeke

Our longest running volunteer, board member and former Secretary, **Libby Luedeke** still travels 60 miles to help with weed control, and she recently began writing a "Plant of the Month Column" which will show up online and in our social media sites.



Have you ever heard of Billbergia? Well, you have now. Billbergias are a beautiful and varied group of bromeliads. We have many varieties here at the garden and many are blooming right now. The good news is that the blooms can last for weeks! They prefer high humidity which Florida has in abundance, and like sandy, well-draining soil. They don't require a lot of water either. Billbergias like full sun, but will also thrive in dappled light. They can handle temperatures as low as 30 F. The blooms vary from light pink and blue to bright red, and can make a striking addition to your garden. Come and see if you can spot the beauty pictured here at the St. Johns Botanical Garden. Here's a hint; look towards the exit. Looking forward to seeing you there!

## Upcoming Projects

**Three major short-term projects need money and volunteers!** The board has voted to add a new 20 x 12 pergola to help our performers and speakers stay dry! The cost is expected to be in the \$3000 range. Tiki Key needs a new dock, and the old dock repaired, so that it can be opened to the public. Estimated cost \$1500. Lastly, the Palmvilion, as it is, needs a roof to make it practical for performers, speakers, and other events in inclement weather. Estimated cost: \$1200. **Any donations towards these projects would be appreciated.** Contact Dr. John Rossi at (904) 553-7563, or our main number (904) 540-3294 if you would like to donate, or visit our website.

## Spotlight On A Volunteer

**Dana Wiest**, our Nature Preserve Docent has been steadily removing invasive plants from the Nature Preserve, and assisting all around the Garden. She also donated a spiffy blue golf cart to the Garden, which has really helped us with all sorts of projects, and has been great to give specialty tours with! So many have contributed so much time and effort this past month and it is hard to choose one person, but I think we can all agree that Dana Wiest has done an extraordinary amount of hard work this month, and then helped all of us work harder, by generously donating the beautiful "Little Blue" to the garden. We can't thank you enough Dana!



## Donations

Again, we'd like to give a big thanks to **Dana Wiest** for donating that beautiful blue golf cart! (Can you tell we love it?) What a huge help that has been in giving tours and helping around the Garden! Thank you so very much!

We would also like to thank **Kit Schiller** for pledging monetary support towards the construction of the new Pergola, a covered place where entertainers and speakers will never have to worry about being rained on again!

**Vego Gardens** has agreed to donate four large plant bins to the St. Johns Botanical Garden! Wow! Thank you Vego Gardens. And thank you **Kaitlyn** for helping to make this happen!

As the Garden enters its seventh month, the officers and board members cannot thank everyone enough for their donations of time and money! We are expanding rapidly and adding new things all the time for your enjoyment! We urgently need donations to keep improving the Garden and make our green gem the pride of Northeastern Florida. Donations of any size are helpful!

Right now is a critical time for the Garden. As the summer heat begins to ramp up, we suspect visitation to drop slightly, and while our tropical plants love the summer rains, our visitors may not. Hence, your donations help to make up the difference. If you have been considering a donation, now is the best time to help your young garden grow and thrive.

## Our Newest Member...

We welcome **Peter Kennedy** as a Nature Preserve Fellow Member to the Garden. Thank you Peter for your generous support!



## Plant Sightings



CAROLINA ALLSPICE  
in the native plant area.



SWAMP AZALEA, native to Florida, has beautiful white flowers that smell like perfume, in the native plant area.



NATIVE WILD AZALEAS in full bloom, in the native plant area.

### SAVE THE DATE

**Saturday, June 8, 2024**

**10:00 am - 4:00 pm**

## June Jitterbug & Vendor Day

***The Garden will be  
rockin' & rollin' all day!***



Wear your favorite band t-shirt or your tie-dye and get a prize!

Arts & Crafts vendors are being invited to set up throughout the garden.

Food trucks will be available, or you can bring your own picnic lunch!

***Spread the word and come on out and dance with us!***

***If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation, please call us at (904) 553-7563, or talk to one of our staff when you visit the Garden, or make a donation online at our website at [www.stjohnsbotanicalgarden.org/donate/](http://www.stjohnsbotanicalgarden.org/donate/)***

To make an announcement or contribute an article (please keep article concise, as space is limited), send it to [president@stjohnsbotanicalgarden.com](mailto:president@stjohnsbotanicalgarden.com).

***AND REMEMBER, YOU HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE!***



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