

## 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 you up to date on the happenings at the Garden. The newsletter features not only the latest news, but also coming events and spotlights on volunteers and their projects. Also, be sure to check out our website for changes and additions to the Garden that occur daily.

To make an announcement or contribute an article, send it to [Palmcabinman@gmail.com](mailto:Palmcabinman@gmail.com).

Please keep article concise, as space is limited.

## Dr. John Rossi

Founder and Resident Botanist



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*Ginkgo Biloba Tree*



*Encephalartos ferox, from Africa*



*Macrozamia moorei from Australia*

## Latest Happenings At The Garden

There has been a flurry of events and improvements at the Garden in the last two months. Things are happening at a breathtaking pace! Many new species of palms and other tropical plants have been added to the garden. Many of the palms added have been from New Caledonia, a large island east of Australia, but another section has seen the addition of palms largely from New Guinea, a huge island north of Australia. And, we have also added one palm called the Crook Fruit Palm, *Loxococcus rupicola*, from Sri Lanka, a large island south of India, with the dubious distinction of coming from a place that has the greatest diversity of leeches in the world! But don't worry! We checked the palm for leeches when it arrived!

Sunshine Trail, the trail leading from the Nature Preserve back to

the Outpost Oasis, has been planted with sun loving palms and plants and it is beginning to take shape. Two new benches have been added in the shade of the largest trees. To this area, we have transplanted one of the rarest palms in the world. It is a Chilean Wine Palm look alike ( $\frac{3}{4}$  Chilean Wine Palm and  $\frac{1}{4}$  Pindo Palm) and there are only 7 (known) of this particular hybrid in the world. True Chilean Wine Palms don't appear to be able to survive here because of our heat and humidity, but this one appears to be doing well so far!

A LIVING FOSSIL, a *Ginkgo biloba*, has been planted in an obvious location in our parking area. These trees have remained essentially unchanged for 200 million years! They saw the dinosaurs come and go! Individual trees

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## Latest Happenings continued from page 1

of this species are extremely long lived. Several specimens are believed to be two thousand or more years old, and four of them survived the atomic bombs dropped to end World War III! Come see our Gingko grow! Keep in mind that they usually turn brilliant yellow in the fall!

***“The Green Thumbs,” our newly named group of dedicated volunteers, continue working throughout the garden. Without them the Garden simply could not exist. They would gladly welcome new members if you would like to volunteer. You may contact Kit Schiller, our Volunteer Coordinator, at [keskit@gmail.com](mailto:keskit@gmail.com)***

The Native Plant Garden has received several more additions, including a patch of Indian Blanket Flowers *Gallardia pulchella*, Fire Bushes *Hamelia patens*, and Coonties *Zamia integrifolia*, all of which are native, despite some of their common names! If you have a native plant or plants that you would like to donate to our native plant area, please contact us!

A huge staghorn fern, 42 years old, has been donated to the garden by Mr. Howard “term limits” Lawson, and it was promptly mounted in a position of honor on one of the large oak trees in the courtyard area by Brandon and Dr. Rossi. It was so heavy that the wheels of the truck began to spin in place as it was hoisted up into the tree with a tow strap!

Jane Villa-Lobos, a Smithsonian trained botanist and a powerful botanical force, has been adding her experience and knowledge, and lots of new bromeliads to the tropical trail and it is beginning to pop with color! Jane also recently donated a new retractable hose which is mounted in the Palm Nursery. Thank you, Jane!

A small new waterfall has been added to the island palm area, as

well as two new benches, making it one of the most beautiful and restful spots in the Garden! Speaking of the island palm area, three new species of palms from Madagascar have been added in the last month. One of which, even though just one-foot-high right now, has the potential to become one of the largest palms in the Garden. In fact, its scientific name gives us a clue... *Dypsis titan*!

Electricity and water have finally made its way to the front fence, opening the way for construction of a waterfall out front, as well as improved lighting, and improved irrigation to the plants in front of the fence. This was very difficult as a ditch had to be carefully dug through a forested area!

Progress has been achieved on Tiki Key – starting with Brandon, our groundskeeper, clearing brush and mowing, followed by the Green Thumbs tackling trimming, weeding and relocating plants. Next, comes the construction of a new dock and the repair of the old one. Doc and Richard Wells worked on the crow’s nest recently. It’s sure to be a popular spot once it is open to the public!

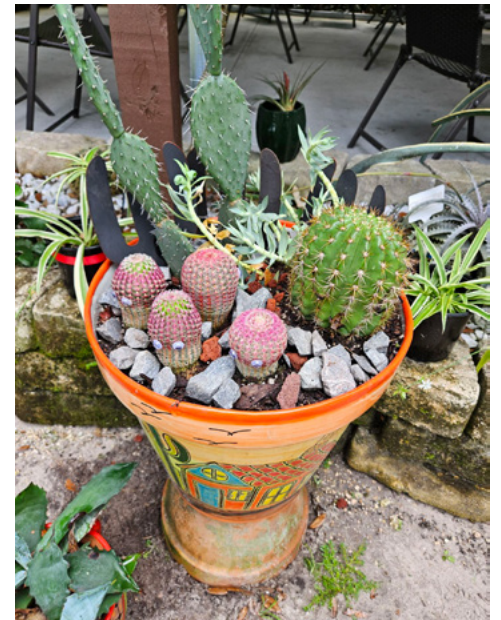
## Recent Past Events

Thank you to those who attended the phenomenal series of talks by Keith Santner, a world-renowned expert on fertilizing plants! What a wealth of knowledge Keith is! We look forward to having Keith back at the Garden in the future.

## Spotlight On A Volunteer

This month we have two volunteers that qualify as absolutely amazing! And we couldn’t mention one without the other because they almost always work as a team! They are Elaine Prisby and Amy Kalmbacher! Like the old Post Office motto, “Neither rain, nor heat, nor the gloom of night stays

these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds (We left out the snow part),” Elaine and Amy will not be stopped! They have transformed large areas of the Garden into much more beautiful places! They have rescued plants, and artistically composed beautiful potted creations throughout parts of the Garden!



## Tribute To Tony Molinaro

Tony Molinaro has stepped down from his role as Vice President for a variety of reasons, including family responsibilities. However, he has decided to remain on as a board member and will continue as our maintenance manager. Tony has been at the Garden from the very beginning. In fact, he was the fourth person to believe in the Garden, and the very first Vice President. He worked hard on acquiring tools and organizing the tool shed which we now have, no easy feat. He helped clean and clear areas that others were unable to tackle. He ran irrigation lines and electrical wires to where they were needed. He put up lights and fans and repaired things that were broken. He went to court with Dr. Rossi to publicly pursue our Agricultural Exemption with St. Johns County. He scheduled

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## Tribute To Tony Molinaro

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events and organized work schedules as the Garden opened. He shopped for and picked up tools and supplies needed for the Garden. He was the first person to adopt trees in the Garden, which bear the names of his grandchildren! And he pushed all of us to work harder, do more, and solve problems. It is safe to say that the St. Johns Botanical Garden would not exist today were it not for the efforts of one of its original founders, Tony Molinaro. In his honor, one of the Picnic Areas in the Garden has been named after him. Tony will still be around; he's just delegating a few of his responsibilities. So, if you see a big bear of a man with a full head of white hair, walking around carrying tools, stop and thank him. He helped to make all this possible. Thank you, Tony!

## Animal Sightings

**Perhaps this is a good time to remind everyone that we are a Nature Preserve as well as a Botanical Garden! We don't just have plants here!** The St. Johns Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve abounds with wildlife. A black bear was recently spotted just east of the main trail in the Nature Preserve! Black bears



*A black bear was recently spotted just east of the main trail in the Nature Preserve.*

are usually very secretive and head the other way if they see or hear you coming, but as the sign entering the Nature Preserve says, *if you see one, move away slowly talking quietly in deep tones*. Report the sighting to the Garden staff.

## 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.*

### **Tuesday, September 14 and Wednesday, September 15:**

#### **The Dog Daze of Summer!**

Bring your dog to the park for a nice walk in the shade. See below for more details.

St. Johns Botanical Garden & Nature Preserve is proud to present:

**Dog Days of Summer**  
September 14-15, 2024  
10am - 4pm

We are super dog friendly and want to prove it!

Come for a walk with your pooch along our shaded canopy trails. While your furbaby is sniffing along, you can be enjoying the most beautiful collection of cacti, bromeliads, cycads and palms.

Stop and rest along the way on one of our many benches, chairs and even a garden swing!

Water dishes to be found along your journey.

At the end of your wonderful walk, we'll have baby pools, hoses and shampoo ready so you can give your pup that doggie bath you've been dreading.

8310 CR13, Hastings, FL 32145  
904-540-3294

### **Saturday, October 19 and Sunday, October 20:**

#### **One Year Anniversary!**

Of course, we are starting to get excited about and plan for our one-year anniversary on the week-end of October 19th and 20th! Live entertainment, food and numerous vendors will be on hand! Mark your calendars! Come see all the changes and additions to your Garden in the first year. In fact, if you haven't seen the Garden lately, you haven't seen the Garden!

Meanwhile the birds have been going crazy. White Eyed Vireos and Cerulean Warblers have been making a ruckus every morning in the Nature Preserve, while Tufted Titmice,

**Saturday, November 9 and Sunday, November 10:**  
**Veteran's Honor and Food Drive**  
Military discounts and support of St. Johns Food Pantry.

### **Saturday, December 14 and Sunday, December 15:**

#### **Festival of Trees!**

Details to follow.

**RECOVERY WALKS** sponsored by St. Johns Recovery Place are held at 8:30 am on the second Thursday of every month at the Garden. Contact (904) 495-0625 to sign up. So far, everyone attending has loved them!

If you would like to schedule a tour for your group, please call (904) 540-3294 to schedule with Kaitlyn, our Garden Manager.

Sponsored by: SJRP

**Discover & Recover**  
St. Johns County

**Monthly Recovery Walks**

**EVERY 2ND THURS 8:30AM**

Join Discover & Recover for a walk in the beautiful St. Johns Botanical Gardens! Get gentle exercise, talk recovery, connect with others, and enjoy the serenity of nature.

**Every 2nd Thursday of the Month**  
7/11, 8/8, 9/12, 10/10, 11/14, 12/12

www.discoverandrecover.org  
904.495.0625



Chickadees, and even hummingbirds are common in the Courtyard area of the Garden. Of course, Catbirds, Cardinals, Brown Thrashers and the

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## Animal Sightings continued from page 3

ever-curious Carolina Wrens are seen daily flitting around the garden.

On the herpetological front, numerous frogs and toads are becoming active, as the rainy season has finally begun. Green Tree Frogs have begun honking in the afternoons to announce the coming of summer showers, and the primitive din of the Southern toads fills the air at dusk. Bullfrogs in the Blue Lagoon can be heard at times in the late afternoon, and the chirping of the Greenhouse Frogs can be heard throughout the day in the beds around the Courtyard area. Tiny newly metamorphosed toadlets can be seen hopping around the entire Garden and Preserve.

Snakes and lizards have also been highly active in the Garden. It seems like the five lined and broad headed skinks are quite common here. Baby Eastern Blue Striped Garter snakes have been seen around the garden as well; their birth no doubt timed to coincide with the arrival of the baby toads and frogs! A large black snake, reportedly larger and thicker than a black racer, was spotted in our entrance drive. We are hopeful that it might be an Indigo Snake, but without a good picture, we don't know. Beautiful Yellow Rat Snakes have also been seen crawling about after heavy rains, presumably hunting for their favorite food, rats and mice! And a gorgeous Scarlet Kingsnake was seen crossing Sunshine Trail late one afternoon!



Yellow Rat Snakes

A new species of turtle for the Garden was discovered this month while she was laying eggs near the side of the creek in the Nature Preserve, a Loggerhead Musk Turtle! This is the



Loggerhead Musk Turtle

very first time one has been spotted in the garden. And speaking of spotting, the search continues for Spotted Turtles, which have been found just to our north within St. Johns County. According to herpetologist Chris Lechowicz, "they should be here." Come on down and help us discover what else lurks in our tropical Garden and beautiful Nature Preserve!

## Plant of the Month

by Libby Luedeke

**Cycads** are seed plants that typically have a stout and woody trunk with a crown of large, hard, stiff evergreen and (usually) pinnate leaves. They have existed for around 300 million years, making them the oldest living lineage of seed plants. *They are dioecious plants, which means there are separate male or female plants.* Cycads vary in size from having trunks only a few inches tall to over 20 feet high! They typically grow very slowly and live an exceptionally long time. Because of their superficial resemblance, they are sometimes mistaken for palms or ferns, but they are not closely related to either group.

Here at the St. Johns Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve, we are fortunate to have a wide variety of cy-

cads from all over the world. Cycads around the world are in decline, with four species on the brink of extinction, and seven species with fewer than 100 plants left in the wild due to habitat destruction and over enthusiastic plant collectors.

You will find cycads scattered throughout the Garden, but I have concentrated on three. The *Encephalartos ferox*, from Africa, *Cycas debaoensis* from China, and *Macrozamia moorei* from Australia. All beautiful cycads, but quite different in leaf shape. You'll find that there are even more cycads with different leaf shapes as you walk the Garden. See how many you can find and strive to learn more about how different they are. They are great additions to any Garden!



*Encephalartos ferox*, from Africa



*Cycas debaoensis* from China



*Macrozamia moorei* from Australia

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## Upcoming Projects

**Three new projects need money and volunteers!**

- **A beautiful cedar pergola**

with a green metal roof has been purchased for the Courtyard area. The cost was just over \$3,000. So far, we have only received one third of this cost. Jerry Luedeke has volunteered to build it when it arrives, but he may need a few helpers. *If you have some experience building, or would like to donate, please contact us!*

- **Tiki Key Restoration Project –**

The Tiki Hut on the lush and mysterious Tiki Key needs restoration! Carpenters who wish to donate some time are desperately needed. This island is at the heart of the Garden and is an amazing little place, rightfully drawing interest. It has its own history. Did you know that they were about to bulldoze the two-hundred-year-old saw palmettos on the island when Dr. Rossi ran in front of the bulldozers to stop them nearly 22 years ago! Did you know that he ended up writing four animal books on this little island? Did you know that he brought many of the now huge palms to the island in a canoe before the bridge was built?! Did you know that aside from setting the first six posts with the help of a friend, he built the entire hut by himself? He said it was his own little tropical retreat, and would stay out there for hours on end, typing away while listening to steel drum music... and possibly drinking a cool Caribbean beer or two! *Well, with your donations and the help of a few carpenters, it will be open to the public and your tropical retreat soon, too! Please contact us if you think you can help with this little whimsical, tropical isle!*

- Back on land, our **One of a Kind**

**Palmvilion needs a Roof** – We have already purchased some of the wood, but the latest estimate to complete this project is around \$1600. *If you can help us “put a lid on it,” please contact us!*

**The Garden, as beautiful as it is, desperately needs covered spaces from Florida showers and all of these projects will help us accomplish that!**

## Donations

We would like to give a big thanks to everyone who recently made a donation! Vego Gardens delivered our four beautiful metal raised garden beds, which we have built and positioned near Sunshine Trail. But we have so far to go in order to make this the Garden we want it to become! We need major donations to make that happen. We have the opportunity to create something great here, perhaps the major botanical garden in Northern Florida! We can double our size. We can add buildings for classes, permanent bathrooms, an enclosed conservatory, a better parking area, a museum, etc... but all of this depends upon you!

Right now is a critical time for the Garden. We are indeed like a seedling tree. A seedling is much more likely to be affected by drought, wind, heavy rain, predation or disease. And indeed, an incredibly young Garden is at the mercy of the economic winds that swirl around us! You can help us become rooted in the community and grow with your donations of time or money. Become a volunteer! Join the Green Thumbs, behind the scenes, as time and skills permit, including occasional volunteering, or come on a regular basis. Or make that donation that will help us to grow!

## ST. JOHNS BOTANICAL GARDEN AND NATURE PRESERVE, Inc.

A Florida Non-Profit Corporation 501(3)(c)

### Board of Directors and Officers

President: Dr. John Rossi

Board Member: Sofi Moss

Vice President: Kit Schiller

Treasurer: Adam Halstead

Secretary: Marian Wood

Board Member: Libby Luedeke

Board Member: Dana Wiest

Board Member: Tony Molinaro

***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/)***

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



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