

Letter From The Editor

Welcome to all of our new members, volunteers, and donors. The Garden Grapevine is published every two months to keep you up to date on the latest happenings in the Garden. The newsletter features not only the latest news, but also coming events and spotlights volunteers and their projects. We encourage Board Members, Advisors, and Volunteers to contribute articles to the newsletter. The Garden is now celebrating its first year of existence! We have come so far, but we have so far to go! The Garden and Nature Preserve needs your help to continue to grow things and improve! The first step is to your membership. The second is to contribute anything you can to help us keep the garden open, preserve the tremendous collection of endangered plants, and maintain the Nature Preserve and the wildlife that need it.

Dr. John Rossi

Founder and Resident Botanist



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A ribbon snake hiding in the bushes.

Latest Happenings At The Garden

Two hurricanes pounded the garden in October! They resulted in a tremendous amount of damage to our oak canopy and the closure of the garden for almost a solid week. We lost several large oaks both in the nature preserve, and in the garden proper. Also, many of the intermediate sized queen palms were leaning badly, and the ground was covered with branches and leaves. Fortunately, we only lost one rare palm to a falling branch, a gorgeous *Gaussia Gomez-pompe*, a Mexican Bottle Palm that had been here for many years! The mess and the loss of income cost the garden a great deal of time, money, and effort to repair. A new, much younger Bottle Palm was found in a small nursery in South Florida to replace the one on display. Many of the queen palms and some of the fishtail palms were staked up straight and hundreds of thousands of leaves were picked up! We wish to thank all of our volunteers for their heroic efforts in cleaning up the mess and bringing the garden back to its beautiful condition!

Because of the hurricanes, and the monsoon rains prior to the hurricanes, the creek was flooded very badly, and the nature preserve was essentially closed for several weeks. Access was allowed so visitors could observe the roaring water and see the force of nature in changing the landscape of a riverine habitat. Fortunately, the water has now receded, and the path through the forest is



Leopard frogs abound in the garden right now, making a racket every night in the Blue Lagoon.

Latest Happenings *continued from page 1*

completely open again, but one can easily see the remnants of the storm! The Nature Preserve would be a great place for an ecology class to visit as it is a prime lesson in changing habitats and the succession of plants as the forest recovers from damage. It is still a beautiful place to visit and listen to the babbling of the creek as it meanders through the woods.

Tiki Key has become a very popular place, since the old dock has been repaired, a new dock and an attaching wraparound deck has been added. Also, the stairs going up the Crow's Nest have been replaced, ramps have been added and everything has been freshly painted. In addition, trails have been widened, signage has been placed, and the Green Thumbs have planted hundreds of bromeliads! Come visit our little tropical island paradise, it's definitely one of a kind!

Work continues along Sunshine Trail, which is the trail most people use to return to the entrance from the Nature Preserve. This planting includes sun loving plants such as agaves, yuccas, cacti, certain bromeliads, and some very rare old cycads. Some of these cycads have steely blue or silvery leaves and they are quite stunning in the bright sunlight! For those not familiar with cycads, they are a primitive group of cone bearing plants that look like palms, but are actually more closely related to pine trees! They have been around since the age of dinosaurs! See the article about cycads by Libby Luedeke in July 2024 Newsletter.



Two snowy Egrets enjoying a rest on one of the docks on Tiki Key.

One of the four metal raised beds that were donated last summer was planted with native plants; another was planted with different color roses by the ever active Green Thumbs! These beds are located near Sunshine Trail!

The three large new ferns that were donated last month are now on display in the garden! Two of these huge Staghorn Ferns, *Platycerium bifurcatum*, which are the Elkhorn variety of the Staghorn Fern, are now on display behind the Palmvilion. The other one, a beautiful and ancient "regular" Staghorn has joined our other Staghorns amongst the oaks. This last one is located along Jungle Trail near our Pritchardia vuylstekeana Palm. Some argue that the term Elkhorn Fern should be reserved for a different species with broader leaves, which are terrestrial, not epiphytic, as are the Staghorns. However, the most common usage of the name Elkhorn Fern is for the longer leafed varieties of the Staghorn Fern. They are still stunning, large tropical plants that make an impact. They are found naturally in Java, New Guinea Northern Australia, and Lord Howe Island.

Beautiful new statues and other decorations are appearing throughout the garden! The Palmvilion is now the home to several dragon statues and Buddah statues, giving it a very unique, tropical Asian look. The African area features a small lion statue as well as a beautifully done "hiding lion face" peering from the foliage! Spectacular glass flowers have been donated and are beginning to appear around the garden!

All four palm species from New Zealand appear to be doing well so far! These are *Rhopalostylis baueri*, *R. sapida*, *R. cheesemanii* and *R. oceaana*. The common name for this group of palms is the "Feather Duster" or "Shaving Brush" palms because of the unique shape of their crowns. Planting them here in Northern Florida is experimental because New Zealand is much cooler than Florida. There has not been much success in Southern Florida with this group of palms; however, they may do well in Northern Florida because of our slightly cooler climate.

Many new species of flowering plants were added to the collection last month! Three new species of the tropical genus *Pseuderanthemum* were added to the Island Palm Area. One, with the common name "Shooting Stars" (*laxiflorum*) is blooming right now! Another (*atropurpureum*) has beautiful purple leaves all the time! But there is always something blooming in the Garden! Different species bloom at different times! That's why you need to visit the garden regularly.



The invasive Cuban Tree Frog. While cute, they are a threat to many small native animals.

We are pleased to announce the arrival of another rare palm at the SJBGNP! A *Sabal lougheediana* native to the island of Bonaire in the Caribbean was donated to us by the Montgomery Botanical Garden in Coconut Grove, Florida. It is on display now. In addition, famed palm expert, Jeff Searle, has donated another rare palm to the garden, *Colpothrinax cookii*. This species is found on the east side of the mountains in Central America and is rarely seen in cultivation. Its common name is the Guano Palm or the Shan Palm.

Behind the scenes, **Education Director Susan Brenner** has been making contacts with many people, and gave a presentation to the Lions Club about our Garden.

On a sad note, the Garden is losing Kit Schiller. Kit is a phenomenal person, who has the energy of about 5 people, and was constantly doing great things at or for the garden. She became an ambassador for the garden, spreading the word and giving out brochures to a lot of people. She also helped to organize things and encouraged people to work as hard as they could. Kit also made a donation to help us acquire the new cedar pergola in the courtyard area. We will miss her!



Visitors had a lot to see at our One-year anniversary celebration.

Spotlight on a Volunteer

We have quite a few great volunteers, so it is hard to pick one, but **Marian Wood** is one of the great unsung heroes of the Garden! Marian has selflessly given of her time and energy, not only as a wonderful Secretary and Board Member, but also as a fantastic and very hard worker! She jumped right in and climbed the crow's nest on Tiki Key to help finish painting it, so we could open it on time. She became a human vacuum cleaner, picking up tons of fallen leaves after the hurricanes! And she often shows up to help with office chores, help us open, help with organization behind the scenes and so many other things that the garden needs. Everyone loves seeing Marian's smiling face at the garden! Thank you, Marian for all you do!

Events at the Garden (Past and Upcoming)

On September 14th and 15th, the Garden held the **Dog Days**. For two days, **the Garden extended a special welcome to dogs and their families and friends!** Dogs got in free to enjoy all the sights and smells of our tropical paradise. Thanks to a vote by the Board of Directors last year, dogs are now always welcome in the Garden, but this was their special weekend. Remember, however, that when they come, they need to be kept on a leash as the Garden is full of cycads and other plants that are extremely toxic if ingested, and in case they have any disagreements with other visitors. You will be asked to sign a one-time waiver upon admission.

Our One Year Anniversary Celebration was held on October 19th and 20th! On Saturday, the 19th, a great local singer and guitar player, **Brad Edwardson**, played in the Garden for the first time. He was great and will be back! And on Sunday, the 20th, **Wild Wonders Animal Show** returned with their great Animal Show.

Then, Palomino Blonde returned! The "blonde" is singer Wendy Petersen, on a palomino horse! It was definitely a one-of-a-kind experience! Food Trucks were available both days, and so were a variety of vendors, selling everything from beautifully painted statues to organic soaps and jewelry! On both days, artists were seen about the garden working their magic on canvas! **A Plein Air Art festival** organized by Education Director Susan Brenner, and Terry Eldridge, was held, and resulted in several wonderful paintings featuring beautiful scenes from the garden. And, the Garden received 20% of the proceeds from the paintings that were sold!

On November 9th and 10th, **the Garden honored Veterans for their service!** Veterans and their families received a discounted admission and free plant. A food drive for St. Johns Food Pantry was also held.



The garden will be closed on Thanksgiving Day (Thursday, November 28th), Christmas Eve (Tuesday, December 24th) and Christmas Day (Wednesday, December 5th).

However, join us in the garden to walk off some of that great holiday food on the days after both Thanksgiving and Christmas. Bring the whole family, including those from up North, who may have never seen a tropical garden! It will be a great and healthy family outing!

Plant of the Month

by Libby Luedeke

Welcome once again to the Plant of the Month! Let's look at the Bridal Veils *Clerodendrum*, blooming right now. The garden is looking especially beautiful now after all the storms have finally gotten past us and the temps are getting cooler.

Head on down to get a look at this beauty. It received its name because of the oodles of drooping white flowers that it produces every fall! Once you enter the garden, head to the right. It is located very near the North Entrance to the garden as you head towards Hope Oak Crossing, just to the left. It is a tall shrub that likes to be in well drained soil, but with lots of organic matter, not sand. It enjoys dappled sunlight and a little fertilizer each month. It is not a fan of cold weather though. Unless it's under heavy oak canopy, it will need to be covered if temperatures drop into the 20s. But don't fret if it gets burned. Give it a trim and it will come back as pretty as ever! Come and see it now before it loses all of its gorgeous white flowers!!!



A Bridal Veils *Clerodendron*



Wendy Peterson performing at our One Year Anniversary Celebration.

Animal Sightings

Wow! There has been a tremendous amount of animal activity at the garden! The fall migration of birds has begun in earnest and the Garden and Nature Preserve is full of birds right now. Even those birds not migrating are very active, feeding heavily in preparation for the coming winter. The woodpeckers in the garden seem especially active, and we have seen quite a few yellow shafted flickers, downy woodpeckers, and pileated woodpeckers lately. Phoebe's, and kingbirds and belted kingfishers seem to have shown up in force, and many egrets have been seen visiting the Blue Lagoon!

Frogs and toads are particularly numerous right now, and so are the snakes that eat them! There are some beautiful, and normally very secretive snakes moving around right now, perhaps hunting for that last meal before they hibernate, or just looking for a place to bed down for that winter rest!

Speaking of frogs, our Garden, like so many others throughout Florida, has become the home of the invasive Cuban Treefrog *Osteopilus septentrionalis*. These large grey colored treefrogs are aggressive predators of insects, but also do not hesitate to feed upon other small vertebrates, like small mice, lizards, and other frogs! In addition, their skin secretions are toxic to dogs, cats and humans, and can be very irritating to your eyes! The Garden is planning a Cuban Treefrog control program beginning next month.



Flowers galore at the garden right now. Shown here is the Shooting Star *Pseuderanthemum*.



Sabal lougheediana, newly discovered rare species is on display now at the garden. It was a gift from the Montgomery Botanical Garden.



The stunning Eastern Blue Sided Garter Snake is found in the Garden and Nature Preserve.



Colpothrinax cookii, the Guano Palm, rarely seen in cultivation, was donated by Palm Expert, Jeff Searle.

Donations

Our Garden needs your help to survive and grow! It is our goal to become one of the best botanical gardens in the Southeastern United States! Imagine that! And imagine it being right here in St. Johns County! What a wonderful thing it would be to preserve this Garden and expand it! Look at all the potential benefits to helping the Garden grow!

1. It would **preserve more green space** in a county that is growing faster than anywhere else in Florida!
2. It would be an **economic boon** for this area and attract people from all over the world! It already has!
3. The Garden could become a fantastic **educational resource** for this area, and **research** conducted here could help guide the direction of landscapers in the future to use new and better water conserving, pest resistant plants!
4. It would become a force for **preservation of endangered species** of plants from all around the world! Research on such things is already underway at the Garden!



One of the most beautiful blooms is seen from a bromeliad along sunshine trail!

Our Garden can't grow without your help! Please make a tax-deductible donation today. And either become a member, renew your membership, or gift someone with one! We need better trails, more benches, better bathrooms, a bridge, a new welcome center and classrooms, a large conservatory, and more staff! We need your help to make this happen!

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation, please call us at (904) 540-3294, email info@stjohnsbotanicalgarden.org, or make a donation online at www.stjohnsbotanicalgarden.org/donate



One of the amazing works of art produced during our Plein Air event at the garden!

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

SAINT JOHNS BOTANICAL GARDEN AND NATURE PRESERVE, Inc.

A Florida Non-Profit Corporation 501(c)3

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Board Member: Tony Molinaro

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The Central Florida Palm and Cycad Society (CFPACS) will have its Holiday Meeting at the SJBGNP on Saturday, December 7th, from 10AM to 3PM. An auction and raffle will be held then, as well as a short ceremony to dedicate a plaque and tree for longtime Board Member and Palm Friend John Kennedy.



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