

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, Committee Chairs, Advisors and Volunteers to contribute articles to the Newsletter.

The Garden is now entering its second year of public existence, and so many things are happening in our young Garden that it is hard to keep up with everything! We truly have come so far but are working steadily for today, and the future! The Garden and Nature Preserve need your help to continue to grow and improve. The first step is to renew (or Auto Renew) your Membership. The second is to contribute anything in time, talents, materials, funding, and word of mouth on social media, and with others! This will expand Garden access, help to acquire and preserve more plants, and maintain the Nature Preserve and the wildlife that need it in a rapidly developing area! Join Us!

Dr. John Rossi

Founder and Resident Botanist



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The
Southern
Fox Squirrel
has been
spotted in
our Nature
Preserve!
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Latest Happenings At The Garden

The Garden has been buzzing with activity and excitement! New statues continue to be added to different areas of the Garden, including the trio of mushrooms near the South Entrance.



The new concrete mushrooms have been placed near the south entrance of the Garden

Donations of beautiful **new trees and flowering plants** continue to arrive, and the "Green Thumbs" have been folding them into the Garden like

excited tots receiving presents on Christmas morning! Many of these new plants have been donated by Ken Pomar, a new neighbor of the Garden!

Work continues on Sunshine Trail, where new rocks and plants are continually being added, for aesthetics AND protection. This includes a **brand-new prototype case for displaying small cacti and succulents outside that has been completed.**



Small cacti on display along Sunshine Trail

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Designed by Dr. Rossi, and **built by new volunteer Joe Landolf**, the Display covers the small species and protects them from heavy rainfall or intense cold out in the open. It is hoped that many of these cases will be built along Sunshine Trail, giving the Garden an opportunity to display many cacti and succulents that otherwise would not survive or be seen commonly here!

Dr. Rossi has extensive experience researching and trying cacti and succulents over many years on the property, and is excited to expand the Displays!

In addition, **our Chief Botanist, Jane Villa-Lobos**, attacked the weeds beginning along the berm, and continued planting some of the beautiful bromeliads she donated to the Garden!

Elsewhere in the Cactus Corral area, a beautiful **turquoise green sunshade** has been put up by **Dena Schaeffer, her husband Mark** and new volunteer, **Joe Landolfi**, thereby doubling the propagation area for the Garden!



The turquoise blue sunshade adds a touch of color and some protection for our ever expanding collection of young plants!



The new prototype for keeping small cacti on display outside is now along Sunshine Trail

The Nature Preserve was visited by Native Plant Botanists, Steve and Susan Farnsworth, on Thursday, January 9th, and they identified scores of native plants, which have now been labelled.



The false rein Orchid was initially found by Steve Farnsworth, and he and other botanists are excited about the habitat in our nature preserve possibly being a home for other orchids.



Scores of plants were identified and labelled in our Nature Preserve by visiting Botanists Steve and Susan Farnsworth, making it a powerful educational tool!

Our Nature Preserve Docent, Dana Wiest, and Dr. Rossi accompanied them, documenting the plants and assisting in the labelling process. There were quite a few surprises as they found some very rare trees, including the Green Hawthorne. The species they found, and the fact that they are now labelled, makes the Nature Preserve an absolutely phenomenal educational opportunity for aspiring naturalists of all ages!

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New “FUN FACT” signs have started to be placed around the Garden. These white and blue signs share interesting details about some of the plants in the Garden, making them more than just ID labels! And speaking of signs, the brand-new ID signs have been appearing around the

Garden, thanks in large part to the efforts of **Sue Wilson, our fantastic Store Manager!**

They are beautiful and long-lasting signs with our logo on each one, and include the common name and origin of the plant, as well as the scientific name. Such signage is ongoing and crucial for Education and visitor engagement, thereby supporting our Conservation goals, as well!



Our new plant signs are beginning to appear throughout the Garden!



New “FUN FACT” signs are showing up in the Garden bringing more than just ID to some plants.

The large Entrance Sign to the Garden was renewed by the hard work of Ephraim Badea (with a little help from his long time friend, Dr. Rossi!) The old letters and decorations were removed; the sign was repainted, and then new letters and decorations were added. It looks great!

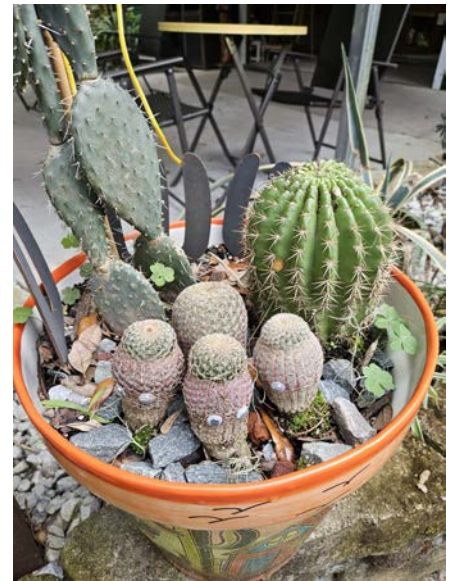


Our entrance sign has been repainted and renewed!

Two new banners, stunning because of our colorful logo on a black background, arrived at the Garden last week, and were picked up by **Board Member Tony Molinaro.**

The banners will be used for shows and other Events that the Garden participates in. One can be seen hanging in the Welcome area at the time of this writing.

Membership numbers have been climbing rapidly in the last several months, and one visitor requested information about becoming a Life Member, which is the first such request.



The beautiful collections of potted plants are a tribute to our hardworking group of volunteers, who call themselves the GREEN THUMBS!

Lots of new volunteers have been coming to the Garden and making their presence known through their hard work! **Kathleen Ujvari** joined **Amy Kalmbacher, Elaine Prisby** and **Dana Wiest** in various plantings and mulching around the Garden. **Terri Wheeler** worked for quite some time in the Courtyard area, getting out some of the weeds that had gotten started there!

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Dawn Desborough, has joined our crew, and has been watering many of the plants in the Garden during the recent dryspell. She has also been brainstorming with **Kaitlyn Fair** on how to get weddings organized in the Garden. **Dawn's family has owned botanical gardens for years**, and she has been advising us on a range of things that should tremendously help us!

Corporate Sponsor, Allied Veterinary Services has pledged \$2,000 again this year! Allied Veterinary Services is one of the premier groups of veterinary surgical specialists in our state, and we are proud to have them as a sponsor. The Garden appreciates all of its Corporate Sponsors and could not exist without them. If your organization would like to become a Corporate Sponsor, please contact us (904)540-3294

Two Researchers and Conservationists, UF/IFAS Professor Emeritus Dr. Michael Kane, and IC Hitchcock Professor of Biology, Dr. Larry Zettler, and two PhD students, Adam Herdman and Will Skinner, visited the Garden on Saturday, January 12th, and were given a tour by Dr. Rossi and Ephraim Badea. They were impressed by the unique habitat here and the species diversity in both the Garden and the Nature Preserve. One of them called our Garden a true gem! They identified habitats in the Garden suitable for native orchids and identified one species they found.

Our Chief Botanist Jane Villa-Lobos and Orchid Advisor Ephraim Badea brainstormed with the supportive visitors for hours afterwards coming up with ideas for the Garden!

Dr. Susan Brenner, our busy Education Director, reached out to the recently expanding Hastings Public Library, and invited them to hold book readings in the Garden. She also wrote **an article for the St. Augustine Observer about the Garden**, which will appear in early February! She also invited and lead the **St. Augustine Photo Club on a tour of the Garden** on Saturday, January 18th!

The North Florida Land Trust representatives, including The Rev. Cn. Allison DeFoor, President, and Conservation Transactions Manager, Kimberly Hall, along with 7 other members of the NFLT visited the Garden on January 14th. Dr. Rossi, Dana Wiest and Kaitlyn Fair greeted them and led them on a detailed tour of the Garden. They were extremely impressed, and at the end of the tour, President DeFoor said, "We're all in, and we will try to help you achieve your goals!" And Conservation Transactions Manager, Kimberly Hall, said she would start working on our project immediately! We are so excited about their help and look forward to partnering with them in the near future!

County Commissioner Sarah Arnold met with our very own Ephraim Badea at the exact same time in the County Office as the NFLT folks were visiting the

Garden! Ephraim extended a personal invitation to the Commissioner to come for a tour of our Garden, and he also received valuable information regarding assistance from St. Johns County!

The Garden, already a member of the **APGA, American Public Gardens Association**, is now also listed with the **BGCI, the Botanic Gardens Conservation International**, a worldwide group working to help with the conservation of endangered plants! We will likely become a member very soon. Our thanks go out to Ephraim Badea for making the connection!

As ever, our Officers have been very busy behind the scenes! **Treasurer Adam Halstead** has been keeping up with all the certifications, permits, fees and taxes required to run the Garden! This is a tough job and often not heralded enough, so **THANK YOU ADAM!!!** And **Secretary Marian Wood** has been keeping minutes of the Meetings, take phone calls, updating memberships, editing the newsletter, and in short keep everything organized, it's no easy task! **THANK YOU, MARIAN!!!**

Fantastic news about our website is on the horizon: Scott Wallace, friend, volunteer, palm expert, AND veteran webmaster has volunteered to upgrade and maintain our website! This should remove some of the pressure from our officers Adam and Marian, as well as Office Manager Kaitlyn, **THANK YOU, SCOTT!!!**

Latest Happenings continued from page 4



Finally, a wonderful PBS series, “Painting and Travel” with Roger and Sarah Bansemer, filmed an Episode at the Garden early in January, including a visual tour and interview with Dr. Rossi, and it’s already beginning to air on over 300 stations, check it out on your local PBS affiliate! Or it may be seen on YouTube, the title is simply, “St. Johns Botanical Garden,” or can be found at: <http://bit.ly/4h2Dpi1>

Spotlight on a Volunteer

So many volunteers have worked so hard this last few months, but Ephraim Badea has really been amazing since he came onboard! From building garden furniture, to meeting with a County Commissioner, to creating, framing and donating a beautiful picture and posters to the Garden, he has been everywhere! He was instrumental in getting us signed up for Trip Advisor, and constantly brainstorms with others on improving traffic flow to the Garden, and if that wasn’t enough, he worked hard to repaint and renew

our big entrance sign up front! He is responsible for connecting with the Botanists at UF and inviting them to the Garden, and has been placing donated orchid son trees throughout the Garden! Ephraim has also listed us with the BGCI (Botanic Garden Conservation International), a group which promotes conservation of endangered plant species. We appreciate how Ephraim has rolled up his sleeves to make our Garden great, **THANKS EPHRAIM!!**

Events at the Garden (Past and Upcoming)

On December 7th, the Central Florida Palm and Cycad Society held its Holiday Meeting at the Garden! The CFPACS is one of the largest and most active palm societies in the State, and the Garden was honored to host them again! The enthusiastic palm lovers started their day by receiving a tour with Dr. Rossi. A little later, a brief ceremony was held **in remembrance of John Kennedy, long time member of the Society and Editor of their newsletter, the Palmateer.** A plaque was placed, and a beautiful palm was dedicated in his memory. The ceremony and prayer were led by Pastor Buddy Lynch of the Mount Olive Baptist Church, which borders the Garden.



Afterwards the tour was resumed, and following that the group broke for a delicious lunch, and held one of their popular auctions. Members of the group who are vendors were also on hand to sell a wide variety of unusual palms and cycads. It was a beautiful day, and everyone seemed to be having a good time. Dr. Ross later stated that it was a pleasure seeing people who really know palms appreciate the tremendous variety that exists here!



Annual Spring Fling & Plant Sale

Saturday, March 29th from 10AM – 4PM

8310 CR 13 S, Hastings, FL 32145

No additional cost, standard admission rates.

10:30AM



**Elaine Prisby, Master Gardener Presents: TIPS THAT
WILL HELP MAKE YOU A BETTER GARDENER!**



11:30AM – 12:30PM

Popular Animal Show: Wild Wonders



1PM-1:30PM

**Dr. John Rossi Presents: The Birth of our Botanical
Garden: How It Began and Where We Are Going!**



2PM – 4PM
LIVE MUSIC by



Guided Walking Tours throughout the day.

Golf Cart Tours available upon request for the walking disadvantaged.

Plant Sale all day!

Delicious Costa Rican Cuisine available from Pura Vida Foods.



For more information visit our website: stjohnsbotanicalgarden.org

Plant of the Month

by Libby Luedeke

There are some amazing aloes out there and we have many of them in the Garden.

The one pictured here is what I believe to be *Aloe arborescens*, the **Torch Aloe**. If I am wrong, please forgive me as there are many different types and there are only slight differences among them. But I had to feature it because it is so beautiful right now!



The plant of the month, the Torch Aloe, is blooming right now at the Garden!



The good news is that their needs are all the same. In a perfect environment they have the potential to reach 6 to 10 feet tall, but that is only likely to occur in their native habitat in South Africa. They are easily grown in sandy, well-drained soil, with full sun or light shade.

They are also very drought and salt tolerant. And this particular species has some cold tolerance as well. Hence, they are excellent in rock gardens or hilly landscapes. The birds and bees will flock to them. Furthermore, they are virtually disease free, but watch for scale and mealybugs.

Aloes provide a great pop of color in the winter while many other plants are dormant. Group with other succulents and cacti as they are great companions. Look for this one on Silver Hill near Caribbean Cove, between some African palms that they may grow near in the wild.

Animal Sightings

A Fox Squirrel, *Sciurus niger*, **has been spotted in the Nature Preserve!** The fox squirrel is North America's largest tree squirrel species. It is known for its very bushy tail, orangish wash on gray fur, and of course, its large size. Their color is extremely variable however, ranging from gray to nearly all black, and many may have only a black head with a white nose and ears! Most do retain orange washed tails and bellies though. Interestingly, some may have white tail tips, like red foxes, while others may have black tail tips, like gray foxes! They may weigh up to three pounds and their body length may be as long as two feet! Add a tail almost a foot long, and you have a very large squirrel. Because of their large size, and

sometimes appearing to have a black mask, one standing straight up in the forest is often mistaken for a monkey by many Floridians! They are extremely secretive and rarely seen by people in many areas. There are ten subspecies ranging throughout much of North America, even though absent in wide swaths of land. In Florida, there are four subspecies, all of which are protected because their numbers are dwindling due to development and habitat loss. The one seen in the Garden's Nature Preserve appears to be the Sherman's or Southern Fox Squirrel, which is definitely listed as a species of special concern by the state of Florida. Their preferred habitat is open forested areas, often riverine in nature and those dominated by

hardwoods like oaks, hickory, and walnuts. But they are often found in swampy habitats dominated by cypress and pines. Hence, our Nature Preserve provides an excellent habitat for these impressive rodents since it has both hardwoods as well as cypress and pine trees. Fox Squirrels are omnivorous, eating a wide variety of naturally occurring nuts, fruit, insects, bird eggs and other varied items. They are not particularly social, and individuals are often found alone. As a trained Field Biologist, and a former professor of Vertebrate Biology, I was particularly excited to find these beautiful animals here in our Garden! We are still finding new species in our Preserve! You never know what you will see. Come help us discover new species at the Garden.--Dr. John Rossi



The African Bush Hibiscus is in full bloom right now in the Courtyard area of the Garden!

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! How amazing it would be to preserve this Garden and its phenomenal Nature Preserve, and to expand it for generations to come! Look at all of the potential benefits to helping the Garden grow:

- 1. It would help preserve more green space in a county that is growing faster than anywhere else in Florida!**
- 2. It would be an economic boon for the 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 and pest resistant plants.**
- 4. It would become a force for preservation of endangered species of plants from around the world. Research on such things is already underway at the Garden!**

But, as mentioned above, 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,

or email to: info@stjohnsbotanicalgarden.org

or donate online at: www.stjohnsbotanicalgarden.org/donate

AND REMEMBER, YOU HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE!