

# SFA Gardens NEWS

## Notes from the Director

By Dr. David Creech

As summer settles in and normalcy seems a distant memory, I can report that SFA Gardens staff members and student workers appear to be surviving. While the nightly news covers COVID-19, protests and never-seen-before economic catastrophes, this garden faces epic state budget cuts and loss of income. Still, as I remind the staff daily, there is always something for which to be cheerful. For the gardening world, the rains have been timely, and no late freezes broke through to mar our spring. That's always a good thing.

The death of plant sales, seminars, workshops and meetings in March means the gardens have gotten our attention. Duke, Malcolm, Thomas and Devin get the congrats on number of plants set, nursing the irrigation systems back into action, mulching like crazy and taking maintenance up a notch. Trails have been given a boost with a new layer of gravel where needed. We've made some effort to get more sunlight onto the Ruby M. Mize Garden floor. The nurseries are brimming over, and we have some amazing plants in the wings. Also on the good news front, when COVID-19 arrived and the spring plant sale was canceled, Dawn deftly requested we move to a virtual plant sale. While the go-ahead didn't happen right away (after all, this is a

university), it did happen, and it worked well and was definitely worth the effort, which included staging 25 pickup times per week and some computer headaches. It was a challenge but is bringing in precious funding that drives the mission and activities of the gardens so, of course, we pressed on with a successful sale.

At the SFA Mast Arboretum, Thomas Dimmitt has taken the lead in bringing the trialing garden back to fine form. In a no-COVID-19 world, we would be getting ready for the "Wild about Woodies" seminar and field day, canceled as a victim of the times. The daylong event is our one-time-per-year opportunity to expose nurserymen, landscapers and enthusiastic gardeners to some great speakers and a tour of the gardens with a focus on woody ornamentals.

The trialing garden is a rotating army of about 150 woody plants, mainly shrubs, in a row-cropped single garden strategy, usually three of each. The big brands are here (Proven Winners, Bailey, Star Roses and Plants/Conard-Pyle, Holiday Hibiscus), and there are other special plants we simply think need a good test in full

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sun. The spot enjoys reliable drip irrigation, mulched beds and good weed control (most of the time). It's mapped and labeled (well, most of them). The objective of this plot is simple: grow and evaluate woody shrubs and a few robust perennials in side-by-side fashion for three to five years, throw away the worst, and then dig, propagate and plant the best elsewhere in SFA Gardens. The plot is replenished as new varieties emerge in the industry and are acquired. The collections include Abelia (13 varieties or selection numbers), Buxus (four), perennial Hibiscus (nine), Rose of Sharon (six), Hydrangea paniculata (11), holly (eight), sweetspire (four), Loropetalum (11), Indian hawthorn (four), roses (10), Spiraea (seven), Arborvitae (seven), blueberry (four), Viburnum (six), Vitex (six) and then a long list of lesser known genera. Everyone needs to grow the little leaf evergreen dogwood from Vietnam, *Cornus quinquevenris*, right?

Having two new hires has made a great difference on what we can accomplish. Right now, I think we've just started, and already it shows. Devin is in charge of the Ruby M. Mize Garden and has been busy bringing the trail edges back to specs, planting, mulching, fine-tuning the irrigation, taking out dead wood and sprucing up the place. Much the same is happening at the Mast Arboretum under Thomas Dimmitt and at the Gayla Mize Garden under Duke Pittman. Malcolm Turner manages the blueberry plot, muscadine vineyard, the fig orchard and the kiwifruit operation. There's plenty to do, for sure. At the Pinyoods Native Plant Center, there's an effort to clean up Sara's branch, and it's been tackled as a collective staff effort. Dawn and Jordan are taking the front of the Tucker House landscape to the next level. On the insurmountable obstacle side, the PNPC trail system is 15 years old and in tragic need of renovation. We are working toward that

with several proposals in the works. Our bridges and boardwalks have been a constant headache with repairs needed almost weekly. Gardens are full of problems, pitfalls and crises balanced with all the good things. A pleasant surprise: I discovered we have a really fine artist in our student worker tribe. Shelby Locklin, fine arts major with an emphasis in sculpture, painted a mural at one of the old kiosks in the Ruby M. Mize Garden, and it's perfect for the spot. It's a forest pastoral view that takes in the flora and fauna that make East Texas such a great spot to live and work.

So, what about the future? What's the big picture? Well, it's obvious to everyone that things are changing daily. We were opening up, and now many businesses are closing down again. Those kind of big decisions are well out of my pay grade. I do know the strategies at SFA on how we teach and work are complicated and subject to change. It's a brand new world out there, and we're all finding our way together. My crystal ball tells me the SFA Gardens fall plant sale is doubtful. Seminars, and workshops are maybe possible if they're low in number and maybe held outdoors? The fact that our crowds lean to the senior citizen side puts us in a special demographic. Knowing the virus's penchant for taking out the old and the wise, it makes me think we'll be closed until there's a vaccine or the virus dies of lack of humans to infect. That's my take. I could be wrong. If you're an avid gardener, this is still the place to be. I wake up every day thinking how great it is that the outdoors is safe and healing. Whether you're working in it, running or walking through it, SFA Gardens remains a really great place to reboot, recharge your batteries and see what the next day brings. Until next time, maintain a healthy social distance, wash your hands, wear a mask, enjoy the garden, and let's keep planting.

# Sales on Stranger Tides

By Jordan Cunningham

You have no idea the anticipation that leads up to the SFA Gardens Gala Day Plant Sale. So much planning, printing, planting and prepping happens in the weeks leading up to the big day that it is all we can talk about. Surely, the plants are just as anxious to get out on the sales floor as staff members are to see them ride away with a happy customer. It is spring, and everything is waking up from a long winter nap. In March, the weather report was promising, and this year's crop was rivaling seasons past. You can't imagine our disappointment when we returned from spring break to find all university events were canceled; or maybe you can. We have all experienced setbacks this season. We are on stranger tides.

We understood SFA's leadership decisions and started focusing more on staff safety, but our greenhouses were still full of beautiful plant material, and the community's desire for SFA Gardens' plants was still strong. How could we safely connect our plants to our buyers? So much creativity has been born out of this difficult time. We have seen online raffle plant sales, social-distancing-approved auction plant sales and plant delivery services. We decided the best way to sell our plants would be to mix and match a combination of these new ideas to build a system that worked for us.

We gave the first opportunity for plant buying to our members and volunteers, and then we slowly opened sales up to the public. We love the rush of in-person sales, but this year, how could we handle a rush of that size? Our army of great volunteers is staying safe at home. Only Dawn, Anne and I, along with a few faithful student workers, were left to pull off the gigantic task. We would love for everyone to have the ability to purchase our plants but, with limited hands, we decided to take it a little at a time.

After we opened to the public, we added an online signup sheet to our Facebook page, @SFA.Gardens, with space for 25 orders. Each person who signed up would receive an email from Dawn with an electronic list of our plant material, including a link for each plant with all of its information. When the order came in, we collected the plants together and put the name of the customer on them. After Anne handled the no-contact payment, the customer would come to the Pineywoods Native Plant Center at an agreed upon time, and we loaded the plants into their vehicles for them! As soon as we finished those orders, a new list was posted. Perfectly safe plant transaction!

We have received great feedback from our online sale. Our at-risk customers were able to participate safely, and folks



who were not available on our actual sale day were still able to purchase plants. A few avid gardeners put in requests for second helpings, and we had some very dedicated gardeners drive over three hours to pick up their plants. Everyone who came expressed excitement and gratitude to have access to our products. Some were fueled by the cancellation of their own local plant sales, and others were just grateful for a chance to get out of the house. One customer found our Facebook page by chance — he had never heard of SFA Gardens before, but he signed up and ended up purchasing over \$200 worth of plants.

We have had success with our impromptu online sale, but we know all of Nacogdoches dearly missed the Garden Gala Day Plant Sale. From all the volunteers who help during the week to the SFA staff members who help with cash registers, from the people who come to find rare plants to the people who just come to watch everyone run when the horn blows, the Garden Gala Day Plant Sale is a community event. This year, during our sales on stranger tides, we were grateful to find a way to connect to our community and are so thankful for your support.

Thank you from SFA Gardens.



## Elyce Rodewald: SFA Gardens Environmental Education Program Coordinator – Extraordinaire

By Anne Adams

Extraordinary: outstanding or remarkable in a particular capacity; synonymous with exceptional, incredible, uncommon, sterling, rare. All those terms certainly apply to our recently retired SFA Gardens environmental education program coordinator, Elyce Rodewald.

April 30 was Elyce’s last official day at work, having served SFA as a valued employee for 22 years. She left amidst the COVID-19 shutdown, which ruled out a retirement reception planned for May 1 in her beloved Brundrett Conservation Education Building. However, in a way, her departure was very Elyce-ish: quiet, understated, determined and perfectly executed.

Earning a bachelor’s degree in zoology in 1980 at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, Elyce soon began working as a zookeeper and educator at the Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo, Minnesota Zoo and Houston Zoo. In 1985, Elyce, along with husband, Mike; son, Seth; and daughter, Emily, decided to move to East Texas to become enthusiastic homeschoolers, goat herders and gardeners. In 2001, Elyce jumped from fauna to flora, becoming the environmental education program coordinator for SFA Gardens.

Since 2001, Elyce has designed, developed and managed the Environmental Education Program at SFA Gardens into one admired by many in the Gulf



South. One of Elyce's many talents was developing our group of volunteers, SFA students and SFA Gardens staff members into a successful team operation providing formal and informal programming for all ages of learners. These included hands-on science excursions for area schoolchildren, afterschool programs for underserved student populations, weekend family activities, garden seminars for adults and summer camps for ages 4 to 15. These programs served around 19,000 learners and visitors each year in Nacogdoches and the surrounding East Texas area.

Elyce's brainchild, the Little Princess Tea Party, held in the Ruby M. Mize Garden every April during azalea season, was always a sold-out occasion. Each year, the tea party had a different theme with Elyce-designed decorations, stories and activities for little princesses from the East Texas area and their mothers, grandmothers and others. In 2019, she wrote and directed a puppet show script for the little princesses based on that year's theme. She also

offered a popular soap-making seminar to adults in the Brundrett Conservation Education Building every fall.

During her 22 years at SFA, Elyce gained certifications to teach environmental education curricula, including Project Learning Tree, Flying WILD, the Leopold Project, Project WILD and Project Aquatic WILD, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Angler Education, and National Archery in the Schools Program. In 2013, the Nacogdoches County Chamber of Commerce named her Agriculture Educator of the Year. In 2016, she received the Forestry Education and Outreach Award from the Texas Forestry Association and in 2017 was honored by the American Association of University Women for her contributions to environmental education.

Over the years, Elyce managed to generate over \$1 million in external funding. She played a pivotal role in acquiring, implementing and delivering programs obtained through grant funding. She had a knack for event planning and creating partnerships with entities like the Boys and Girls Club of Nacogdoches, City of Nacogdoches Parks and Recreation Department, Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful, Nacogdoches Photographic Association, Pineywoods Audubon Society, and Pineywoods Beekeepers

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Association. At SFA, Elyce developed successful departmental partnerships within the Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture as well as biology and elementary education departments. Other successful liaisons were established with SFA Gardens volunteers, SFA's Outdoor Pursuits, the Texas A&M Forest Service, TPWD and the U.S. Forest Service. Her résumé included over 20 grantors and donors to her career efforts, and she was instrumental in developing the diversity of programming offered under the SFA Gardens umbrella. Elyce was actively involved with the funding, acquisition and sustainable building design of the Brundrett Conservation Education Building, the only solar-powered building in Nacogdoches, which was completed in 2014. The building continues to derive 83% of its electricity from the sun.

“The growth of SFA Gardens and its conservation education program is a testament to Elyce’s hard work and many talents over the years in building community partnerships, encouraging a corps of dedicated volunteers, cultivating student involvement and maintaining administrative support,” said Dr. David Creech, SFA Gardens director. “She has been part and parcel of the SFA Gardens mantra to educate, entertain and enlighten all who visit this special garden resource.”

Here at SFA Gardens, Dr. Creech and the rest of the staff will greatly miss Elyce, her many talents and wealth of wisdom, leadership and friendship. We wish her a happy, healthy, well-deserved retirement with husband, Mike, and family and hope to catch a glimpse soon of her taking a leisurely stroll through the gardens with new grandson, Bennett!

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## Pollinators, Prairies and Perennials

By Dawn Stover

In the world of flowers, June may be my favorite month. Sure, summer has turned on the heater, but perennial flowers are realizing their full potential. Despite the fact that we are well past azalea season, the SFA Gardens are spectacular right now. This year especially, flowers are everywhere since we planted many of the colorful flowers that would have been part of our plant sale. Part of the successes of our plant sales is the impulse buying these lovely flowers invoke, but now these blossoms are filling more of our garden spaces than ever before. That is definitely a good thing since our number of guests has exploded due to social distancing measures.

June also means some special designations of which I'm quite fond. The first Saturday of June is National Prairie Day, and in 2006 the U.S. Senate approved the designation of the last week in June as National Pollinator Week, and the whole of June is known as Perennial Gardening Month. I just love alliteration, and “pollinators, prairies and perennials” not only rolls off the tongue, but they are elements that work very well with one another.

In basic terms, a prairie is an ecosystem dominated by grasses rather than trees. There are three types of prairies: tallgrass, mixed grass and shortgrass. In Southeastern Texas and Louisiana, tallgrass prairies occur and are dominated with little bluestem, Indian grass and switch

grass. Prairies are fire-maintained landscapes that keep the woody species in check, allowing for grasses and forbs to take center stage. We find many high-quality nectar sources here with perennials like wild indigo (*Baptisia spp.*), milkweed (*Asclepias spp.*), rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), blazing star (*Liatris spp.*), yellow cone-flowers (*Rudbeckia spp.*), sunflowers (*Helianthus spp.*), asters (*Symphiotrichum spp.* and *Eurybia hemispherica*) and goldenrod (*Solidago spp.*).

The tallgrass prairie is the most endangered ecosystem in North America as its rich soils are highly prized for cropland and its relatively flat topography is highly prized for development. Prairies are important because of their rich botanical diversity that in turn provides food and shelter for a wide array of wildlife, from insects, including pollinators, to birds and small mammals. Perennial prairie plants have extensive and deep root systems that increase water filtration, slowing down flood waters, reducing erosion, sediment and pollution, giving us better water quality. Prairies also are amazing carbon sinks with those extensive root systems sequestering carbon underground. The Texas Land Trust Council published a study in 2019 called “Valuing Economic Benefits of Texas Conservation Lands,” and the trust estimates that these lands provide more than \$1 billion in benefits to Texas taxpayers in areas



Perennials play an important and beautiful role in the restored Eunice Prairie. Here, an ironweed blooms amidst a sea of goldenrod. Both plants are critical late season nectar sources for pollinators.

like flood prevention, improved water quality, and support of rural economies through agriculture, timber, ranching and wildlife hunting leases. Prairies, especially coastal prairies, play a big part of this.

Prairies and other native ecosystems are critical for insects, especially pollinators. It is estimated that one in three bites of food we take are attributed to insects. Countless wildlife species depend on insects in their diet, and three-fourths of all flowering plants depend on insect pollinators. Scientific studies conducted around the world indicate there has been a significant decline in our insect population since the 1970s. There is no singular smoking gun — a host of contributing factors has led to this, with the biggest contributor likely habitat loss. As an example, of the 170 million acres of original North American prairie, only 4% still exists, and it's closer to 1% for the remaining tallgrass prairies in our neck of the woods.

That's a lot of doom and gloom, but we can make a difference in small ways by planting pocket prairies

wherever there may be an opportunity, whether it be at your own home, a school, a public park or even your church! Pocket prairies are loosely defined as areas less than 1 acre that feature plants native to your ecoregion — the native stipulation is what distinguishes a pocket prairie from what we know as a butterfly garden.

To make a pocket prairie, choose a sunny location, and make it as big of an area as the maintenance crew can realistically handle — whether it be you, the city parks crew or volunteers. Make sure turf grass is killed or removed, and get ready to plant. Because you are using native plants from your ecoregion, soil prep isn't always necessary unless you have really compacted soils. Sowing seeds is the cheapest method to establish plants, but you have little control over design, and it may be difficult to source seeds that come from plants in your ecoregion. For example, *Asclepias tuberosa*, or butterfly milkweed, is native

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from the Great Lakes to New England, down the Eastern Seaboard through the Gulf of Mexico and in large parts of Arizona and New Mexico. Genetics from a butterfly milkweed in Michigan will likely not fare well in Texas, and genetics from far West Texas will not adapt to deep East Texas. I prefer to work with live plants as I have better control in the design process, and I can tailor the plant palette to my liking. Look for plant sales with your local native plant society or your friendly neighborhood botanical garden. I have been collecting seeds in our Texas Forest Country ecoregion for the last couple of years, and most of the native plants we offer at our SFA Gardens sales are now locally sourced. Don't forget to include grasses as they provide food, habitat and roosting opportunities for wildlife, and stick with a modest number of varieties if you don't like the "wild" look. I like the nine natives concept created by several cooperating entities in the Houston area: choose nine species that have differing bloom times, have a similar aesthetic and serve several functions for wildlife. More information can be found on the Katy Prairie Conservancy website at [katyprairie.org](http://katyprairie.org).

Although not our original intention, the Red Hot Bed at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center is a great example of a designed pocket prairie. We chose warm colored plants as our theme, and it's a lively mix of orange, red, yellow and purple. Plants include lantana (*Lantana horrida*), wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), Joe-Pye weed (*Eutrochium fistulosum*), rough goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*) and gulf blazing star (*Liatris tenuis*). We've just added a few more red flowers with coral bean (*Erythrina herbacea*), downy goldenrod (*Solidago petiolaris*) and scarlet catchfly (*Silene subciliata*). A backdrop of golden wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera* 'Soleil') gives us our nine natives. We had some little bluestem (*Schyzachyrium scoparium*) that didn't do well, and we will likely replace that grass element with prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) this fall with its yellow flower panicles matching our theme nicely. I tend to shy away from warm colors, but this combination is quite stunning. You can see a cool color complement of this around the Brundrett Conservation Education Building with heavy emphasis on Lumberjack purple. Both prairie plantings are magnets for pollinators who find our perennials to be perfectly pleasing!



A pipevine swallowtail butterfly nectars on butterfly milkweed — a plant commonly found in prairies across much of North America.



Coral bean and lantana are both incorporated in the Red Hot Bed at the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center. Both plants provide nectar for hummingbirds as well as insects.





## Hibiscus Summer Ruffle

By Dr. David Creech

If I had to pick a favorite woody shrub right now based on our trials, it would have to be a Rose of Sharon or althea, known as the First Editions Summer Ruffle™ Hibiscus, *Hibiscus syriacus* 'Aarticus' PP29104. We like it. We've planted many althea varieties in SFA Gardens over the years, and just about all of them have survived and thrived. They are a woody landscape staple in China along roadsides and in parks. Dr. Michael Dirr, professor of horticulture at the University of Georgia and expert on woody plants, lists over 30 varieties, and all have pluses or minuses. I like Aphrodite, Diana, Helene, Blue Bird, Blushing Bride, Lucy and Sam McFadden's pink. We have a small plant of 'Sugar Tip,' another variegated variety introduced through Proven Winners. It looks similar, but time will tell.

Across varieties, altheas vary in form, but with time most tend to grow into very large deciduous shrubs. They can be cut back and trained to tree and shrub forms. Bloom color runs from the whites, pinks, lavenders, purples and all the way to nearly red. I've never seen an orange. There are simple flowers and frilly doubles and in between.

I can remember the very first variegated althea that landed in our garden many years ago. I think it was from the JC Raulston Arboretum at North Carolina State University (although it

might have been from Tom Foley with TreeTown USA). At any rate, the *Hibiscus syriacus* 'Purpurea' was a sad looking thing, and while the variegated leaves were beautiful, we soon learned the bloom would never really open. It would start to open and just quit — just not ready for prime time, I suppose.

Well, Summer Ruffle™ changes things. It's a showboat and evolves into a nice-sized plant without much work. Steve Bruin, propagator at Lincoln Nurseries in Grand Rapids, Michigan, found growing it a sport. In spite of its origin, Summer Ruffle™ did not suffer in the low chill winter of 2019-20 with only 650 hours below 45 degrees Fahrenheit in Nacogdoches. Bailey Nurseries introduced the variety about five years ago and provided us with test plants. This variegated Rose of Sharon has blue-green foliage with crisp creamy white margins. Lavender blooms come in late May and early June, and the summertime show continues, if conditions allow. Reported to reach 3- to 4-feet tall and wide normally, I suspect it could get taller in an East Texas landscape, maybe 5 to 6 feet. Right now, we consider this a stellar new dwarf althea with great foliage and flower quality.



## Into the Woods

By Jocelyn Moore, Oliver Moore and Weston Moore

If your kiddos are anything like mine, they are beyond bummed that Pineywoods Camps were suspended this summer due to COVID-19. Luckily, that hasn't stopped us from spending plenty of time outdoors — we are so lucky to live in a community with such treasures as walking and biking trails meandering through cultivated gardens! My sons Oliver (12)

and Weston (9) thought it would be fun to share some of their favorite outdoor learning activities for families to enjoy either in the backyard or throughout the trails of SFA Gardens.

### *Oliver's Excursions*

My name is Oliver, and as a former SFA Gardens' Jack Creek camper and member of the weekly outdoor learning club, Nacogdoches Naturally, I have experienced tons of amazing outdoor activities, including some hiking games I would like to share. These games you can play almost anywhere and require very little materials.



Oliver creates "eco-art" using leaves.

### Nature Sounds:

The first game I'm going to tell you about is called Nature Sounds. This one you can literally play anywhere outside and works best in nature-filled areas like the Tucker Woods. All you need are your ears and good listening skills.

- **Step 1.** Find a good area to play in. Though you can play anywhere, it is best played where everything is quiet except for the sounds of nature.

- **Step 2.** Close your eyes. Listen to all of the noise around you, like bird calls or trees swaying in the wind. You can keep track of all of the sounds you hear by putting up a finger for each new sound.
- **Step 3.** Open your eyes. If you're with people, you can look around at others' hands and compare how many sounds you have heard with each other. Share your favorite sounds. You can even try to spot some of the birds you heard.



We teach eco-art each summer to our campers, which asks artists to use only items found in nature — no glue or manmade materials — and is inspired by the creations of eco-artist Andy Goldsworthy.

## Duplication:

The second game is called Duplication.\* To play this one, you need two bandanas and an area to collect items like acorns or pinecones. It works best with a medium to large group of people.

- **Step 1.** Collect around eight items and lay them out on one of the bandanas. Try not to use anything living, like flowers or insects, and instead use nonliving things, like pebbles, acorns or pinecones.
- **Step 2.** Cover the items with the second bandana and call everyone around. Tell them that you're going to lift the bandana for 25 seconds and cover it back up then they are to go out and collect as many items as they can remember.

- **Step 3.** Once they've all finished collecting, call them back around and pull out one of the items from underneath the bandana. With the item still hidden in your fist, tell them about it, but don't use its name. Then open your fist and ask how many people found that item. Repeat with all other items until there are none left. Then play again!

*\*Duplication is adapted from "Sharing Nature with Children" by Joseph Cornell, which is a great book for parents, caregivers and environmental educators!*

## Weston's Suggestions

My name is Weston Moore, I have been in Nacogdoches Naturally and Pineywoods Camps for three years. If you are wanting to go on a hike and want something fun to do, I have a game that involves at least two friends for this "supa fun" game: find a leaf together and then start your hike. When you feel that you have walked, ran or biked a good distance, stop and look for that same kind of leaf. Whoever can find the same kind of leaf first wins. Then finish off and enjoy your hike in nature.



Weston delights over an anole before putting the little guy back where he found him.



## COME GROW WITH US.

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### Plant Profile: Clustered Bushmint, *Hyptis alata*

By Dawn Stover

I'm always up for a plant trade, and I'm really excited when one of my friends comes up with a native I've never seen before. A small circle of us crazy plant folks get together in the East Texas forests and look for new plants and seed sources to increase the genetics in the native populations. One friend, Mark Tietz of Wildscapes LLC out of Tyler, shared a unique plant with me a little over a year ago called the clustered bushmint. (Mark and I have similar goals in growing local ecotypes of East Texas natives to provide to the public.) Having never seen this plant in the wild before, I've since encountered it at least three times from Houston to Jasper to Eunice, Louisiana. I'm really enamored with this quirky native, which at first glance looks like it could be a cross between mountain mint, rough blazing star and wild bergamot with a little rattlesnake master thrown in. That's not really possible since those plants come from three distinct plant families, but it gives you



an idea of its uniqueness. Clustered bushmint is in the mint family and produces rounded, white flower heads throughout summer and fall. It's almost always found in acidic, sandy, wetland soils in sun to part shade, but I'm having great luck with it in average garden conditions in full sun. As with mountain mint and rattlesnake master, the clusters of white flowers don't immediately grab the human's attention, but they have great architectural merit and are in the elite group of highly prized pollinator plants in the SFA Gardens.