

# 2007 ASA Convention Azaleas in the Pines — A Texas Garden Party

Barbara Stump — Nacogdoches, Texas

This next spring the 2007 convention organizing committee will welcome you to a Texas you may not know...Not the land of sagebrush, desert colors, and cowboys. Not even the huge oil-based metropolis of Houston. No, our area of Texas, the Pineywoods ecological region, is rich in trees, verdant in foliage, and just the right size for friendly people and specialty nurseries. Located geographically in northeast Texas (130 miles north of Houston, 200 miles southeast of Dallas-Fort Worth, 300 miles east of Austin, 340 miles east of San Antonio, and 96 miles west of Shreveport, Louisiana), Nacogdoches has been a crossroads for Native Americans, Anglo settlers, and commerce for 300 years. Nacogdoches is a stop on El Camino Real (the King's Highway, now Highway 21), which began as a network of Indian trails and was designated as a National Historic Trail in 2004. The combined threads of plant diversity and history run consistently through all the events planned for the 28th ASA convention.

Our garden party will show you plenty of azaleas in our loblolly pine forests and gardens in two towns, Nacogdoches (home of Stephen F. Austin State University-SFA) and nearby Tyler (home of the Texas Rose Festival). Because the Texas Chapter of the ASA is still in a reorganizational mode, SFA's Mast Arboretum is hosting this convention, with big help on the plant sale from the Louisiana Chapter.

## Local Plant Diversity and Climate

Physically, you will be in East Texas, a region that encompasses 62,600 square miles (38% of the total area of Texas) and runs from the Arkansas border on the north, to the Louisiana border to the east, and nearly to Austin and Houston on the west and south. To say that our area is rich in diversity is an understatement. The native and established introductions listed by the *Flora of East Texas* number 3,402 species, slightly more than two-thirds of the flora for the whole state of Texas.

Our climate is USDA Zone 8b, nearly tropical, with average annual rainfall of 45-50 inches, hours of frost rather than weeks or months of it, and soil that is typically acidic sandy loam. This means we have to chill tulips in the fridge if we want to grow them, but we can plant amaryllis and narcissus bulbs out to perennialize at will. Even with 17°F last Christmas, sweet potato vines

(*Ipomoea batatas*) just made bigger tubers and are more robust as ground covers this year. So, our plants have to be able to tolerate some cold, along with lots of heat and humidity; we mulch in fall *and* summer. The average high and low temperatures you can expect during the convention should be between 68°F and 53°F, but we'll update the current data on the convention Web site.

All this adds up to a very long growing season (between 120 and 150 days over 86°F each year) in a transition zone that lies between the eastern deciduous forest and the central North American grasslands. Azaleas thrive here, especially the large-leaved Southern Indicas that make a big statement in the landscape and the very floriferous Kurumes from Japan. It has been interesting to see how well the Ohio-born Girard azaleas, the late-blooming Satsuki, and the Huang hybrids from China have adapted here. These growing conditions are also nearly perfect for remontant hydrangeas and roses, and, of course, for the repeat-blooming Encore® azaleas. So, come to East Texas for an early spring (March 28-April 1) and return home in time for a second spring in your own gardens.

## Special Hosts

The SFA Mast Arboretum is teaming with the Nacogdoches Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Tyler Council of Garden Clubs, and the ASA Louisiana Chapter to host this Texas garden party. This means we will have even more diversity in the plant material for the plant auction and many people who are very keen on making sure you have a great time at our convention. Please see the convention insert (following page 66) for details about how to get to Nacogdoches.

## Speakers

Speakers have been chosen to emphasize the diversity of plant materials, history, and legacy of the gardens we will be seeing. (See following article.)

## Tours

You will get a little flavor of college days on our bus tours, since we will be using SFA team buses for most of the transportation. Continuing the collegiate theme, we will have one "Away Day" and one "Home Day."

## *"Away Day" — Friday, March 30, 2007*

Bright and early on Friday, we will board our purple-and-white (SFA colors) buses for the trip to Tyler, home of a 27-year-old Azalea Trail. It will be an enjoyable drive of a little over an hour through the rolling East Texas countryside, but it will really be worth it. To be sure to pack everything in, we will be asking you to get your coffee, tea, or juice early and board the buses for a "traveling breakfast" on the way.

### *Tyler Rose Garden/IDEA Gardens*

Our first visit is the world-famous municipal rose park, the **Tyler Rose Garden**, a 1938 Works Project Administration (WPA) project, enhanced by American Rose Society rosarians who also helped Tyler develop its rose-growing industry (photo below). The site includes WPA-era stone picnic pavilion, balcony, and stairs, and the Rose Garden Center and Rose Museum dedicated in 1992. The Tyler newspaper stated, "This is the largest municipal park and rose garden ever approved by the WPA." One serious challenge to the plantings was the soil, which was essentially a "red clay gully." You will hear more of this story on our tour of the gardens.



In 1955 an All-America Rose Selection Trial Garden was established here, one of over 25 located in various geographical areas throughout the US. Important results have come about through these trials. Due to the heat of Smith County's summer, certain viruses in specific rose cultivars were more readily detected than in cooler climates. Dr. Eldon Lyle, plant pathologist for the Texas Rose Research Foundation and the test garden judge for 39 years, reported these findings to the AARS, and the nurseries propagating the cultivars were able to take action against the viruses.

The garden now is planted with 30,000 rose bushes, featuring over 450 cultivars! The peak bloom period for roses in Tyler is October, when the Rose Festival events, including the Queen's Tea, take place. The Tyler Council of Garden Clubs is hosting a welcome reception in the foyer of Rose Garden Center, so be sure to enjoy the com-

pany of some of our newest ASA members. There is a gift shop, as well.

Also at the Rose Garden site are the **Smith County Master Gardeners' IDEA Gardens**, which are a series of small gardens that display various good gardening methods and new planting combinations (photo below). The content of these gardens changes as needed. There are examples of new pathway and bench materials, backyard composting facilities, and plantings of new small ornamental trees. Several **Master Gardeners** will be on hand to interpret the current features of the gardens. There is also a nice display of roses and Japanese maples on the wooded hillside facing the Rose Garden.



### *Ina Brundrett Azalea Garden at Tyler Junior College*

This garden at Tyler Junior College (TJC) was featured in the Winter 2005 issue of *The Azalean* (photo below). Designed by ASA member Naud Burnett, it is in its second year of growth and beautifully frames an entrance to the college. It is amazing to think how this garden used to be nothing but a driveway and a neglected parking lot. The success of this garden is just the beginning of a total "campus arboretum" concept that TJC is working to achieve. Tyler Mayor Joey Seeber and some members of the local press will meet us here, because they are very





interested in the ASA coming to visit Tyler. TJC Development Director Mitch Andrews and Mrs. Brundrett will also outline some of the future garden phases in our brief stop at this growing junior college.

### *Short Bus Tour of Tyler Azalea Trail*

We will drive by some of the eight miles of the lush Tyler Azalea Trail gardens on our way to lunch. One reason for visiting Tyler on Friday is to avoid the crush of traffic that happens on the weekends. Over 100,000 visitors drive or walk by these 150 homes each year.

### *Lunch Stop and Tyler Azalea Trail Gardens*

We will lunch in the dining room of the 1932-vintage Tyler Woman's Building. It is located in the heart of the Azalea District, an officially registered historic district dedicated to residences with wonderful azalea gardens that agree to be on the Azalea Trail tours. Since lunch will be served buffet-style, you can either eat before or after you walk around the block to see two other beautiful gardens.

### *Pyron Garden*

Just two doors down (at 212 W. Dobbs Street) is the Guy and Joan Pyron Garden (photo below). This garden is a jewel of colorful companion plants, pink azaleas along a masonry-lined creek bed done by the owner, and a lovely new Arts-and-Crafts-inspired pergola. This garden has been featured in *Southern Living* and *Texas Highways*.



### *The Children's Garden*

Kitty-corner from the Woman's Building is The Children's Garden, which began as a wonderful garden memorial project for a particular child and has grown to commemorate all children. Developed by a local citizens' fund-raising effort, through the Children are a Gift Foundation, the completed park was donated to the City of Tyler in October 2004. The design is fully ADA-accessible, and features lots of stonework and fountains in which children can play.

### *Final Garden Visit*

Our last garden visit for the day will be **Ravenwood**, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Ellis (photo below). Begun in the 1930s, the six very formal gardens highlight the Georgian Colonial home. The color scheme is pink and white, with a formal drive, reflection pool, and mirrored garden room. Approximately 1,500 azaleas (including 'Pride of Mobile', 'Hinodegiri', and 'Pink Elegans') are accented by sculptured crape myrtle, dogwood, pecan, and live oak trees. The gardens are a part of the Smithsonian Institution-Archives of American Gardens, and the home is a Tyler Historic Landmark. The Ellises frequently use this setting for medical community fund-raising and we thank them for very graciously opening their garden to us. (Shown in photo below are Betsy Ellis, left, and Tyler convention coordinator Jo Ann Smith.)



### *Return Home and Evening Festivities*

We'll bid Tyler goodbye and head home. The evening begins with a Tex-Mex buffet dinner with cash bar to help everyone relax for the rest of the convention and the evening's speakers.



### *"Home Day" — Saturday, March 31, 2007*

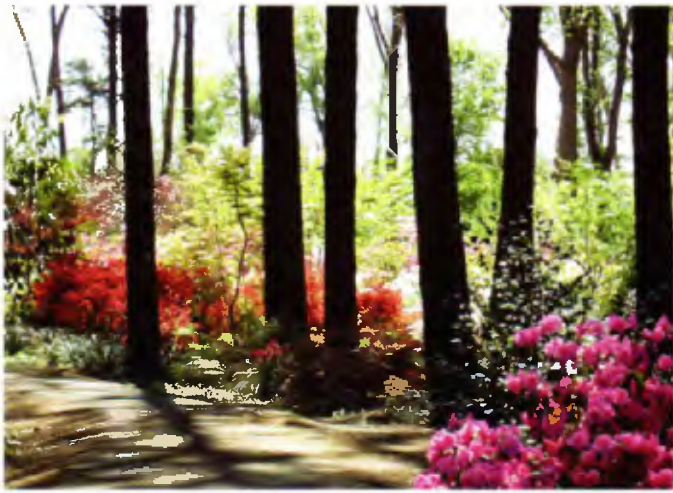
The bus trips this day will be really short, since we are staying within five miles of our convention hotel, The Fredonia Hotel & Convention Center. We'll begin with a leisurely buffet breakfast, at which you really can get all you can eat. Then we'll take our buses to the SFA Mast Arboretum Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden.

### *Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden*

The last time the ASA heard about this garden—in 2000, during my keynote speech at the Charleston, South Carolina, convention—the garden was in its infancy, and I talked about what we were planning to plant. Now the eight-acre naturalistically designed garden is six years

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older, and we've met most of our goals and then some (photo above). As a result of that speech, we were given several thousand more azaleas from ASA member-nurserymen in Alabama (Van der Giessen Nursery), Louisiana (George Johnson), and Texas (Pope's Nursery), and we have built 20 more beds, and planted many more collections. The 1.27 miles of trails are now asphalted and easy on the feet. This very colorful garden is truly a garden that exists as a legacy of people who *care, truly care* about azalea gardens: First, the ASA board informally agreed to adopt the garden as a project that the ASA could and should support. Second, a number of other ASA nurserymen and women have donated (or sold at cost) some completely unique specimens to make up most of the collections in the five beds of our "Azalea Cultivar Evaluation" area. Third, we have had the direct and personal support of a wonderful SFA alumna who created a dedicated endowment to support the continued development of the garden. There are 45 beds, over 8,500 plant specimens in the garden; of these 6,500 are azaleas, from 52 hybrid groups, and representing 525 named cultivars. With so much to see and talk about in this garden, we will spend the entire morning hours in this maturing garden. My Azalea Garden volunteers and I will have labeled the azaleas and the over 1,500 exotic Asian trees and shrubs; we will see how many you ASA members tell us we have to re-label! If you desire, you can also cross our lovely bridge to visit the 11 acres of the main Mast Arboretum gardens, as well.

### *Lunch in the Stump's Garden*

A very quick bus ride through one of our four historic districts will bring you to a catered BBQ lunch at the restored 1901 Queen Anne style home of Mike and Barb Stump. Set high on Irion Hill (named for an early Nacogdoches settler, doctor, and surveyor), this home was built by Philip Sanders, a cotton broker. Talented craftsmen used heartwood of the then-plentiful Longleaf pine for paneling in the parlor, den, dining room, the beautiful staircase, and the second floor landing. Fully restored in 2002-2003, this home has 2.5 acres of garden in front of it that the Stumps have landscaped with an

eclectic mix of colorful azaleas and plants from the two SFA Mast Arboretum sales held each year. The plan of the garden was to mimic a typical Victorian "mixed shrub border," with comfortable strolling trails. You are invited to tour both the home and garden.



### *Nacogdoches Azalea Trail Tour*

After lunch we will drive a portion of the 24-mile Nacogdoches Azalea Trail route through some of the most beautiful neighborhoods on the way to our final garden stop.

### *Nacconiche Gardens Nursery Tour*

The buses will head out of town for just a little side-trip to Nacconiche Gardens (photo below), which carries unique heritage, hard-to-find, and Texas-adapted companion plants as well as deciduous azaleas. Owner Sue Ripley also offers garden design work done by SFA horticulture program graduate Nathan Unclebach and installation by long-time Nacogdoches gardener JoAnn Carter. Yes, you can buy plants at this stop, if you like, and then the buses will bring you back to the convention hotel.



We are lucky to have this wonderful niche nursery so close to Nacogdoches, so that we can tour it conveniently. Others within a 300-mile radius will be listed in the registration confirmation packets, just in case you would like visit them while traveling to or from the convention.

## Plant Sale

Speaking of plants, we will have a collection of various sizes of deciduous azaleas, some new plants from Buddy Lee, and possibly even some camellias from the Louisiana Chapter. As soon as we have a listing of likely offerings, we will post them on the convention Web page. Since the SFA Mast Arboretum spring plant sale fund-raiser is being held April 14, there is no space for propagating our own azaleas, so we are relying on friends and local commercial sources. A few of the choice offerings from the Arboretum sale may be in the plant auction after the annual meeting, however. A few will be offered in *Dr. Creech's plant raffle* Thursday night. Keep your eyes open.

Note that on the convention schedule, *open hours for the plant sale are limited*. When the convention participants are on a bus, the plant sale will be closed. This is to save our volunteers' time and energy. However, there will be plenty of time Saturday afternoon for purchasing plants.

## Annual Meeting, Banquet, Plant Auction

Saturday evening festivities will include all the required elements and as much fun as we can pack in!

## Contact Info (More listed on Insert)

Convention Web Site (with links to more information on the gardens listed above.):  
[www.nacogdochesazaleas.com](http://www.nacogdochesazaleas.com)

SFA Mast Arboretum  
Agriculture Building  
PO Box 13000, Wilson Drive  
Nacogdoches, TX 75962  
<http://arboretum.sfasu.edu/>

Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden  
<http://azalea.sfasu.edu/>

El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail  
Used by Native Americans, then French and Spanish explorers, this trail follows Highway 6 in Louisiana and Highway 21 in Texas, and became a main highway through Nacogdoches and then on to San Antonio and Mexico City.  
<http://www.elcaminorealtx.com/>

Tyler Children's Garden  
For photos, see <http://www.pbbase.com/mrd/>  
For background on the foundation, visit  
<http://www.childrenareagift.com/childrenspark.html>

*Barbara Stump was awarded her MS in Agriculture for "Site Analysis and Design of the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden" in 2001. She continues to work part-time for the SFA Mast Arboretum, coordinating improvements to the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden and in general development projects for the Arboretum. She has been the editor for The Azalean since 1999, and now plans to devote all her energies to getting the gardens ready for the ASA Convention in March.*

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# Convention Speakers

All of our speakers are talented horticulturists who enthusiastically "spread the word" about the richness of the plant world and the satisfaction to be gained from gardening. They also represent the continuing legacy that we as gardeners nurture every day.

## Thursday Night, March 29

**Dr. David Creech, "The SFA Mast Arboretum-Diversity Includes Azaleas."** Dr. Creech, director of the Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) Mast Arboretum and Regents Professor of Horticulture at SFA, will welcome us with an overview of the diversity of plants that grow in the East Texas Pineywoods and in the SFA Mast Arboretum.

Since coming to SFA and Nacogdoches in 1978, Dr. Creech's research and development history can best be described as diverse and busy. Trained in fruit and vegetables, most of his early career at SFA focused solely in that arena, and he still continues that interest with blueberry germplasm research with the USDA Agriculture Research Station in Poplarville, Mississippi. In 1985 he began to develop the Arboretum, which opened up

avenues for research with new ornamentals. Much of that work has involved evaluating new plant materials for Southern landscapes. He was president of the Texas Native Plant Society from 1991 to 1992. During this time he initiated the Arboretum's "Three Rs Program" ("Rescue, Research, and Reintroduction") to thoroughly research endangered Texas species. In 1998 these endangered plant trials were moved to the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center, now the Arboretum's fourth big garden project. In the same year he began work on what has become the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. He has been very active in promoting practical experience for his students through the American Society of Horticulture Science competitions. Most recently he has been working with Chinese colleagues in the US and in China on *Taxodium*, blueberries, and pharmaceutical potentials of other plants, including *Camptotheca acuminata* and the ferns of the Hardy Fern Foundation.

**Greg Grant, "East Texas Yard Art-Historic and Modern."** Greg will regale us with a humorous overview of "garden architecture" made from old or found objects while intro-