

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

Barbara Stump & Barbara Wagner—Nacogdoches, Texas

We are now well into summer temperatures here, and luckily we are outside the flood zones of central and northern Texas. The Society's visit to Nacogdoches and Tyler in the cool, overcast days of March 29-April 1 seems now to be a dream. It was great to have 85 members and a few visitors from Houston and Tyler join in the annual convention. You certainly came at the right time—exactly one week later we had a freak snow fall of about two inches of fluffy wet flakes that stayed on the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden blooms just long enough to water them. What an amazing sight.

The Stephen F. Austin State University Mast Arboretum staff and volunteers, the Louisiana Chapter members, the Tyler Day Blue Ribbon Committee, and the Nacogdoches Convention & Visitors Bureau all pitched in to host the first-ever two-city convention. Since so much of the convention was hosted by the university, we used the model of an "away day" in Tyler and a "home day" in Nacogdoches. Yes, the bus trip to Tyler was over an hour, but we balanced that with several very short runs in Nacogdoches the next day. Thanks to nearly 40 helpful and gracious people, the convention events

▼ A sculpture in the City of Tyler Children's Garden memorialized beloved children and reminded us of the child in all of us.

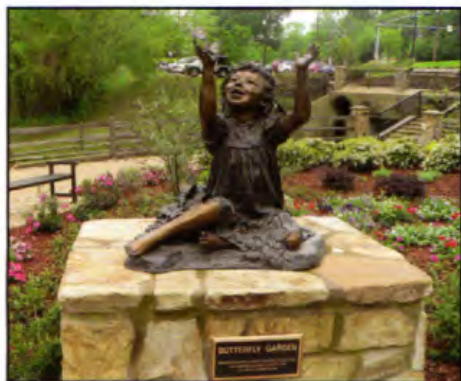


Photo Joe and Donna Coleman



Photo Joe and Donna Coleman

▲ The neighbors in the heart of Tyler's Azalea District share handsome "burrowed landscape" views of each others' garden.

▼ The Guy and Joan Pyron Garden in Tyler's Azalea District has a custom-designed gazebo, shown here with tiers of azaleas.

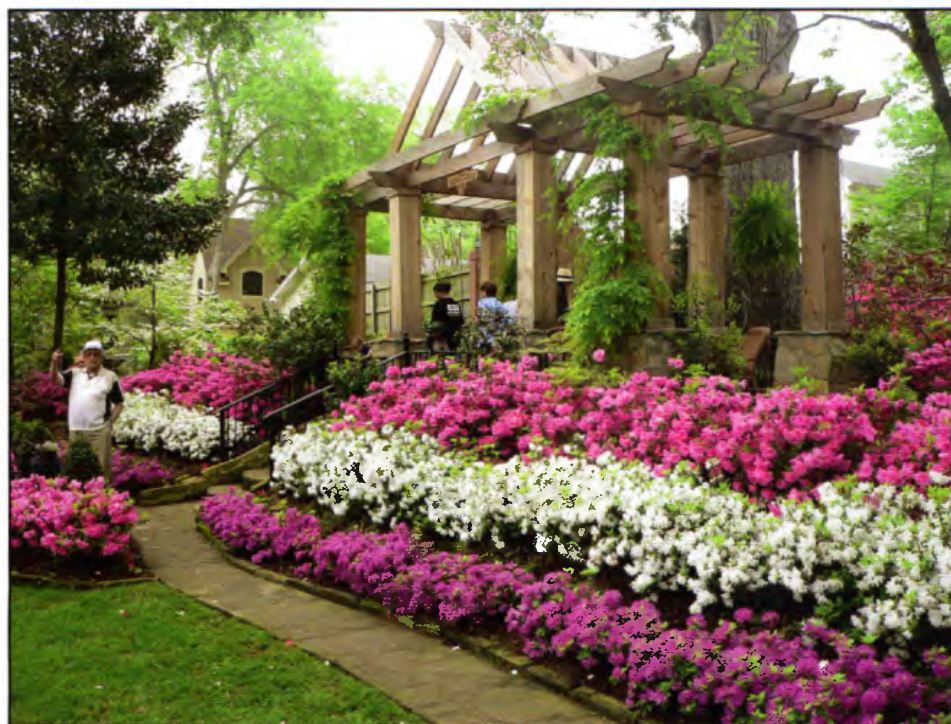


Photo Joe and Donna Coleman



Photo Barbara Slump

▲ The Ina Brundrett Azalea Garden at Tyler Junior College was recently expanded this spring to include the newest Encore® azaleas thanks to Buddy Lee and Flowerwood Nursery.

▼ The dedicatory Council Ring plaque in the center of the colorful Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden.

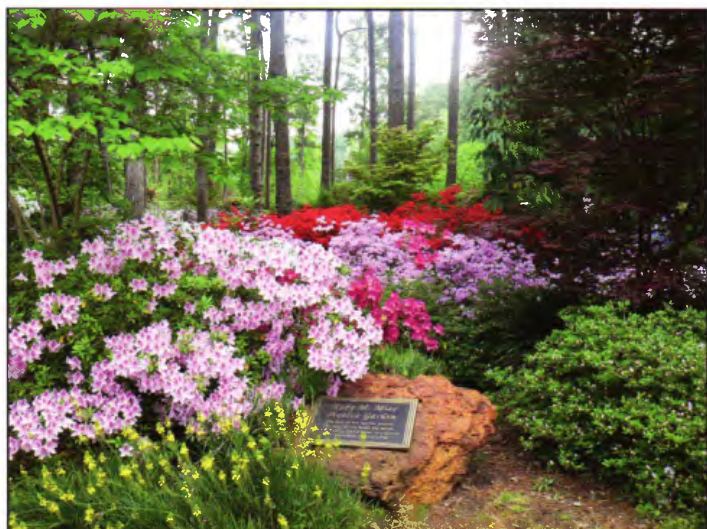


Photo Joe and Donna Coleman

all went off superbly. We thanked them officially in the handout that went into the convention bags, but we also want to do this again in the sidebar at the end of the article.

We were very pleased that so many of you came all the way to our lovely town of Nacogdoches, Texas. Most flew into Houston or Shreveport, Louisiana, and rented cars, but a number drove. Driving, as we all know, is the best way to bring plants to share and to take plants back. Our plant sale was a success, thanks to all of you. We especially thank **Buddy Lee, Maarten van der Giessen, and Ms. Margie Jenkins** for making sure we had some interesting plants in the sale. It was a real treat for us all to get Ms. Margie's new 'Freddie' azalea as a table favor, and the small Encore® azaleas were a great bonus.

Nacogdoches Mayor Bob Dunn and Tyler Mayor Joey Seeber each got their chances to give a good Texas welcome to the ASA. We kept that Texas hospitality thing going, since so many of you had not been to our part of the world before. As the events unfolded it became obvious why we chose our theme of "Azaleas in the Pines—A Texas Garden Party."

Not only are there many loblolly pines creating the filtered shade that promotes good azalea health and heightens their color, but our garden visits made us feel like we were special guests at very select garden parties. Even our hotel fit the theme, with a lovely pool area surrounded by azaleas in full bloom.

Thursday Night Talks

Arboretum Director **Dr. David Creech's** talk introduced the diversity that has made the SFA Mast Arboretum so well known among nursery owners and botanic gardens. We are proud of our unique gardens and the fact that we cooperate with many other arboreta. From research with blueberry cultivars to evaluating bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) and other *Taxodium* clones to hollies, gingers, and teaching the next generation about both horticulture and environmental education, the Arboretum gardens do it all.

Next to speak was **Greg Grant**, Research Associate for the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center and a well-known horticulture author. He wowed us with his slides of fields of Texas wildflowers, his favorite old-home-place bulbs and garden architecture finds (aka "yard art"), and some good companion plants for azaleas.

We ended the evening with another convention first, but a standard way to end a Mast Arboretum lecture; a rare plant raffle. Dr. Creech and Ms. Margie Jenkins had brought along a few of their rare favorites from their shade houses; some people were lucky that night! Maybe future conventions will repeat this fun way to learn about new companion plants.

Friday—"Away Day" to Tyler

We got cracking early for the trip to Tyler, even overcoming a slight delay when one of the bus company's owners had to pinch-hit for her driver who'd been stung in the eye by a wasp. Breakfast on the bus worked out fine and the drive through farmlands went quickly.

Our welcome to Tyler at the Rose Garden was indeed special. Not only was there fabulous reception food, but also the City of Tyler had arranged a *full-scale press conference* for the awarding of the Azalea City designation for Tyler by **Joe Schild** and ASA President Buddy Lee.

Mayor Joey Seeber read the city's proclamation that March 30, 2007, was Azalea Society of America Day in Tyler. There must have been 100 people involved in this event, with lots of publicity photos taken. Meanwhile, the Smith County Master Gardeners gave tours of the "IDEA Gardens" that are part of the Tyler Rose Garden. The azaleas and Japanese maples in the garden were in full bloom. Because the ASA people were so nice, the homeowners whose gardens we were visiting later that day invited us into their homes as well as into their gardens. Talk about great Texas hospitality.

The buses then took us to Tyler Junior College, which has been working on developing the entire campus as a botanic garden. Central to this is the Ina Brundrett Azalea Garden, which we toured with Ms. Brundrett herself. New

Encore® azaleas had just been planted to expand this lovely garden right on a main entrance to the campus. Students also showed us plans for future gardens and the new James F. and Virginia Hawkins Gatewood Garden, which will feature a wide variety of Texas-adapted groundcovers.

After a quick trip through the five-mile Tyler Azalea Trail, we stopped in the heart of the Azalea District. Members ate lunch at the historic 1939 Woman's Building and toured residential gardens all around the block and the City of Tyler Children's Garden. What a lovely series of gardens these were. The sidewalk around the block is at a higher elevation than the backyards, so it was easy to see the wealth of colorful azaleas and other wonderful plantings.

These neighbors also really get to enjoy the "burrowed landscape" design concept: each yard is visible from the other and all looked beautifully maintained. From a boxwood parterre to plantings of new Southern Indicas and Encore® azaleas among tall shade trees and Japanese maples, water features, and statuary, the gardens gave us many ideas to try at home. The City of Tyler Children's Garden gave us a place to enjoy statuary that children would love; we played a little, too.

Lunch was wonderful as well, a full meal, not just a box lunch. The Chamber of Commerce provided table favor azaleas and an azalea for each member.

The final stop in Tyler was Ravenwood, which was like the final crescendo in a symphony of lovely gardens. The historic home has formal gardens that are immaculately maintained: a pink-and-white azalea color scheme, a reflecting pool, a swimming pool, and a mirrored garden pavilion. Homeowner Betsy Ellis and her garden club were very gracious hosts in this garden that has been the site of fund-raisers for many important projects in Tyler over the years.

Once back in Nacogdoches, dinner was a Tex-Mex buffet. Buddy Lee talked about how he's been deciding what azaleas to select and breed over his 20-plus years of "hobby gardening." All this work has led to the Encore® azaleas that we know today, but we know he's not stopping yet. Like Dr. Creech is about trees, we doubt Buddy has ever met an azalea that he didn't like, and didn't want to have a "sample" from.

To end the evening, **Dr. Len Miller** of the American Rhododendron Society showed us what he's been doing with his masterpiece garden, Lendonwood, in Grove, Oklahoma. It was fun to see that even masters begin with mud pits and bridges that start out as sticks and end up being replaced by more "finished" materials as time and money permit.

The ARS is hosting their annual convention in Tulsa in 2008, and Lendonwood will be one of the most delightful stops along the tour route.

Saturday—"Home Day" in Nacogdoches

We were all happy to sleep a little later and stay near home. The weather looked threatening, and we "Barbaras" fretted some about whether we'd have to cancel the tour, but

luck was with us. The weather in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden was overcast and a little sprinkly, but pictures taken that day show how flattering gray light is for azaleas.

Of course, the Society already is familiar with the development of the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, since there have been several articles about it in *The Azalean* in the past six years, and members have been helping develop the collections in so many ways. So, after a brief introduction to the garden by **Barbara Stump**, we let everyone enjoy the eight acres for more than two hours. A local garden club provided refreshments under a Texas flag tent.

The photos included with this article show the diversity of azaleas (more than 520 different cultivars) that make this garden such a treasure.

From deciduous *Rhododendron canescens* 'Becky's Blush' and Huang hybrids that Barbara and **Mike Stump** brought back from the ASA plant auction in Mobile to the new Encore® azaleas and Aromi hybrid deciduous azaleas,



Photo Joe and Donna Coleman

▲ Deciduous *Rhododendron austrinum* 'Firecracker' from the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden.

▼ Harris hybrid 'Frosted Orange' photographed June 6 demonstrates the long bloom period in the Mize Azalea Garden.



Photo Barbara Stump

there were plenty of blooms other than the typical Southern Indicas in many residential gardens in the area. Dr. Creech led an optional rapid-fire “walk-and-talk” tour of the arboretum side of LaNana Creek. We finally had to call them back in by cell phone.

Then the buses took us to a Texas barbecue lunch on the lawn of the Stumps’ historic 1901 Queen Anne house just five miles from the arboretum. It sure was fun to see the reactions of Joe Schild, Ms. Margie Jenkins, Maarten van der Giessen, and Buddy Lee as they saw some of their plants in the “eclectic” gardens amongst more typical Southern Indica azaleas, arboretum plant-sale plants, Chinese fringe trees, and lots of garden projects-in-progress. Barbara Stump can now devote more time to caring for these favorites, with *The Azalean* in Pam Fitch’s able hands.

The last tour of the day was a bus tour through about one-third of Nacogdoches’ 23-mile Azalea Trail with some Texas history thrown in and a stop at Naconiche Nursery



Photo Joe and Donna Coleman

▲ Huang hybrid 2-5-71 from the Mize Azalea Garden exhibits lots of sanding and speckling.

▼ Diversity in plants and garden architecture is a standard at Naconiches Nursery. The rings on the tin shed wall are pieces of tire that are cut off when you make a “crown-tire planter.”



Photo Joe and Donna Coleman

▲ ‘Roblen’ from the Mize Azalea Garden.

▼ Holly Springs hybrid ‘Becky’s Blush’ from the Mize Azalea Garden.



Photo Joe and Donna Coleman



Photo Joe and Donna Coleman

▼ Saturday’s barbecue lunch in Mike and Barbara Stump’s front yard allowed ASA members to see deciduous yellow azaleas matching the color of the home and garage.



Photo Carol Flowers

just outside of town. The nursery reminded us of Greg Grant's talk about yard art as we saw crown-tire planters, a bathtub lily pond, and many lovely metal trellises in amongst the unique perennials, shrubs, and grasses. They are also carrying some of the new deciduous azaleas for the discerning gardener. One specially featured plant was the 'Peggy Martin' rose that survived several weeks of inundation in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. Named for the green-fingered garden-owner, a portion of the proceeds from the sale of these plants is going back to restoring New Orleans gardens.

As always the final events of the convention were the banquet, annual meeting, and rare plant auction. Texas radio and television garden personality **Tom Spencer** from Austin had us spellbound with his "Soul of the Garden" talk about the many personal themes that guide a gardener if he or she is willing to listen to echoes from their past experiences, or spiritual and mystic impacts of other events while they garden. It was unfortunate that while he was asking us to listen to our inner voices there was a loud fund-raiser going on in the hotel's meeting room next door. Tom was a trooper and carried through beautifully. He even put some of his pictures of our convention and the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden on his Web page, www.soulofthegarden.com.

The plant auction was fun and helped the new Texas Chapter raise about \$500 for its treasury. "The Barbaras" want to officially thank you for the pleasure of your company this past March.

We also send special thanks to **Joe and Donna Coleman, Dale and Carol Flowers, and Bill Miller** who sent us their pictures of the convention. They are a real treat and will help us remember those busy but happy days with the ASA. You are all welcome back to Nacogdoches any time, especially during Azalea Trail time!

Barbara Wagner, a native Texan, grew up in Dallas and lived in Austin for 18 years, serving as an administrative assistant and development officer at the University of Texas at Austin before her family moved to New York for nine years. While in New York, Barbara began gardening and joined a local garden club. When a new job took the family to Nacogdoches, Barbara joined the Flora Garden Club and began volunteering at the Mast Arboretum. Barbara Wagner met Barbara Stump and the rest is history. During the planning phases of the ASA convention, Barbara Wagner swore she'd never organize another convention, but the week after the ASA convention, her garden club voted to host a regional garden club convention in March 2008. So it goes.

*Barbara Stump was awarded a Master of Science degree 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 edited **The Azalean** 1999-2006.*

Special Thanks to Our Convention Organizers

Co-Chairs Barbara Stump and Barbara Wagner
Welcome ... The Honorable Bob Dunn, Mayor of Nacogdoches
Registration Melissa Sanford, Eloise Adams,
..... Roger & Shirley Hughes, Sara & John Bowie
Publicity Amy Roquemore
Hospitality Suite Ashleigh McCorkle
Treasurer Jimmy Rodriguez

Stephen F. Austin State University

Bus Transportation Vic Shepherd, Rusti Allen,
..... Don Hetrick, Jim Horton
Convention Hosts Dr. David Creech, Dawn Stover,
..... Greg Grant, Elyce Rodewald
Nursery Information Coordinator Josie Crowson
Plant Selection Leon Macha, Nancy Snoberger
Plant Sale Chair Sherrie Randall
Plant Sale, etc.! SFA Mast Arboretum Volunteers
..... Gerry Peacock, Annette Dawson, Peg Kern, Betty
..... Manning, Harry Mansfield, Don & Bonnie Orr,
..... Bonnie Hammett, Pauline Patterson, Margie Rodriguez
Bus Captains George Patterson, Don Parsons, Dick Voigtel
Community Volunteers Flora Garden Club, Judy Hairston,
Dolores Martin, Jean Rudisill, Tip & Nanny Smith, Mike Stump

Nacogdoches Day Tours

Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden Barbara Stump,
..... Dr. D. Creech, Elyce Rodewald
1901 Home Garden Barbara and Mike Stump
Nacogdoches Gardens Sue Ripley, Nathan Unclebach

Tyler Day Events

Tyler Blue Ribbon Committee Chairs LaVerne Gollob,
..... Ina Brundrett, JoAnn Smith
Publicity & Nametags Annette Findley
Garden Tours Homeowners Bonnie & Don Edmonds
..... Margaret & Gordon Davis, Joan & Guy Pyron
..... Elmer & Betsy Ellis, assisted by the
..... Gertrude Wilson Garden Club and Mignon Adams

Tyler Rose Garden

Proclamation The Honorable Joey Seeber, Mayor of Tyler
Press Conference/Media Laura Krantz, City of Tyler
Refreshments Charlene Miezenner
Goody Bags Linda Gross, Barbara Sinclair
IDEA Garden Docents Keith Hansen, Craig Reiland,
..... Sue Adee, James Whilite
Complimentary Azaleas Justin Turner, Henry Bell

Tyler Junior College

Welcome & Garden Docents Mitch Andrews

Tyler Woman's Building

Catered Luncheon Shelley Arnold
Children's Garden Docents Kristi Boyett
Table Decorations Linda Whetsell, Sandee Walters
Tyler Tour Bus Docents Annetta Payne and Don Edmonds

Special Thanks to the Nurseries that Donated Plants

Country Pines Nursery, Richard Odom, Forest Hill, Louisiana
Flowerwood Nursery/PDSI, Jim Van Antwerp
& Aimee Coker, Loxley, Alabama
Greenleaf Nursery, Leon Macha, El Campo, Texas
Jenkins Farm & Nursery, Margie Y. Jenkins, Amite, Louisiana
Van der Giessen Nursery, Maarten van der Giessen,
Semmes, Alabama
Texas Chapter, ASA, Bart Brechter
Louisiana Chapter, ASA