

BEAUTYBERRY POST

THE NEWSLETTER OF MACKAY GARDENS AND LAKESIDE PRESERVE

March/April 2016



Always Worthy of the Extra Effort by Steve Franklin

Directly across from the entrance to the neighborhood where I live is an old section of highway which parallels busy Spirit Lake Road, like the pits along the main straightaway of a race track. When I set out on a bicycle ride through Winter Haven that short piece of road allows me the luxury of a smooth, safe ride until reaching its end. There I begin pedaling down into the drainage ditch beside Spirit Lake Road and up across each driveway I pass in order to avoid riding on the road where the risk of being run over by a truck or a distracted driver is extremely high. Fortunately for me that obstacle-course portion of my ride is also relatively

short in length. This is how all of my bicycle rides to Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve begin, but what's important is the remainder of the ride and where it ends.

Neighbors I've spoken to about my cross-town excursions seem to find these short trips incredible or fool hardy. Being familiar with people who ride their bikes 20 to 100 miles several days a week, I know there is nothing incredible about a nine-mile ride. Granted, riding a bike near fast-moving traffic has its risks, but I do my best to minimize those by riding on old pieces of road, through drainage ditches, on sidewalks when they're available, or in neighborhoods with quiet streets. However, situational awareness is an absolute must for a safe bike ride in town.

Actually, one's situational awareness becomes heightened by a ride through the churning atmosphere of a thriving city. For instance, we become much more aware of the quantity of pollutants in the air when, instead of cruising along in the controlled atmosphere of a motorized vehicle, we're actually out there smelling and inhaling all of those exhaust emissions. That alone is enough to convince us that there really might be something to this global warming thing. And then there's noise pollution. Certainly mufflers have accomplished a great deal when it comes to reducing the amount of noise that cars make, but there are still trucks hauling heavy loads and Harleys hauling thrill seekers, which hungrily growl up and down those streets and highways as well. Have you stood on the corner of a busy intersection lately and just listened to the sound of the tires rolling past on the road? It's scarier than the buzz of an active beehive. Add to these ear irritants the other normal and industrial sounds of a city--the clanking of old church bells, the screaming of sirens, the blaring of a boom box--and the cacophony is enough to send a sane person sailing off the edge of reality.

Riding a bicycle through town is, in some ways, like wearing an itchy sweater. By pulling it on we automatically expose our skin to its abrasive fabric. While on a bike we travel slow enough to see every piece of litter lining the road. We notice junk vehicles parked in unkempt, grassless front yards, and we are occasionally frightened by the fierce barks of dogs, which we're usually grateful to find securely tied to an anchor or restrained behind a chain link fence.

By now you might be wondering why I ride my bike in town at all. Fortunately, my course often lies beneath a blue sky filled with the animal-like shapes of brilliant white clouds. It takes me past large, glistening lakes, over a bridge which crosses a lushly landscaped canal, through well-manicured neighborhoods with beautifully designed homes, up a bike trail which in some places is lined by trees which provide an abundance of ground-cooling shade, and past other healthy, happy riders who usually smile knowingly and wave. I say knowingly because we each realize that we're doing nothing to contribute to the harsh sounds, unsightly waste products, and pollution of the water and air in the city; a very good feeling indeed. And last but not least, my ride to Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve is worthy of the effort and patience required to complete it because when I arrive there I find myself at a destination that is replete with the fresh air and vibrant, living colors that only green trees and decorative plants

with open blossoms can provide, a place so tranquil that contentment is a byproduct of its existence. And folks, that's exactly why a bicycle ride across town to visit the gardens and preserve is always worthy of the extra effort that it requires.

The cover photo shows the eye-popping red and black seeds of the rosary pea, *Abrus precatorius*, L. Rosary pea is thought to be a native of India and other parts of Southeast Asia. Considered a historic ornamental plant, this climbing, woody vine has become a rampant nuisance in central and south Florida since its introduction pre- 1932. Read more about this plant in Recent Happenings in this issue.



Calendar of Events

March

- 3/3- **Edible Flowers** with Pat Cherundalo-10am. A Master Gardener & “edible landscape enthusiast”, Pat returns for her third program at MGLP with this new, original look at flowers as food. Come take a fresh look at the beautiful, edible & often vitamin-rich blooms all around us.
- 3/6-**Interpretive Nature Walk** with Steve Franklin – 2pm. Join our seasoned environmental interpreter on a guided walk along MGLP trails. On this moderately easy walk Steve will also share information on the natural and cultural history of this area along with an occasional poem.
- March **Volunteer work dates:** 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 Tuesdays 9am – noon.
- 3/26- **Saturday** volunteer work day! 9am – noon.

April

- 4/7- First Thursday presentation; **A Virtual Walk through Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve** with Steve Franklin - 10am. If you haven't been able to attend one of Steve's popular walking tours of MGLP then sit back, relax, and take an "armchair tour" in this PowerPoint presentation. Steve uses his love of nature, people and his talent for poetry to bring us a new understanding of the history behind this beautiful piece of Lake Alfred, Florida.
- 4/10- **Interpretive Nature Walk** with Steve Franklin - 2pm. During these monthly walks, interpretive guide, Steve Franklin leads guests along MGLP trails discussing history and nature while helping his guests to re-connect with the great outdoors.
- April **Volunteer work dates**: 5, 12, 19, 26 Tuesdays 9am – noon.
- 4/16- **Saturday** volunteer work day! 9am – noon.
- 4/30- **Astronomy Night** with Cleve Carter-7-10p.m. Come and learn the basics of astronomy from someone who has passionately pursued learning about the night sky since he was 14. His great interest has led him to write a book, *The Future is in the Stars*, and build an observatory in his own backyard! An observing session on the back lawn will follow the presentation, weather permitting. Some telescopes will be provided but feel free to bring your own.

May

5/5- First Thursday Presentation: **Milkweeds and Monarchs** with Ginger Hansill-10 am. "Those Marvelous Monarchs" is how Master Gardener Ginger Hansill describes them...and you will see why as we learn about this butterfly and its amazing migratory habits, the alarming population decline experienced in the last decades and what we can do to help.

All events are **free** unless otherwise noted.

Have you considered volunteering at MGLP? Volunteers are absolutely essential to conducting successful programs and continually improving the appearance of MGLP. Volunteers work in garden

areas, help restore native habitats in the preserve, develop and perform educational programs, and assist with advertising, fund raising, and volunteer recruitment. By donating a small portion of your time you are helping to improve and protect a piece of Florida's rich history and the habitats which surround it. If you'd like to become involved in any of these very worthwhile endeavors, please contact Volunteer Coordinator, Cathy Butcher, at cassiebelle@verizon.net.

Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve is located at 900 Mackay Blvd. in Lake Alfred, Florida, 33850. It is free and open 7 days a week from dawn until dusk. To inquire about renting the house or picnic shelter, or to ask about upcoming events please call Parks and Recreation at 863-291-5272. Beautyberry Post is a bi-monthly newsletter edited by Cathy Butcher with assistance from Steve Franklin. To receive the BP by email please contact Anaeli Quinones at quinones@mylakealfred.com. Also, please feel free to forward it to interested friends.

If you would like to peruse back issues of the **Beautyberry Post** you can find them at the City of Lake Alfred's website, mylakealfred.com. Look for the newsletters under Parks and Recreation, Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve.

Please help promote awareness of MGLP by LIKING our **Facebook** page. Check out **Friends of Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve** to keep up with events, see photos, and read interesting historical information.

Photos in this issue are by Cathy Butcher unless otherwise noted.

The first installment of the following article, The Incidental Benefactor, can be found in the January/February 2016 issue of the Beautyberry Post.



About the author;

Steve Franklin, recently retired, spends as much time as possible practicing his current hobbies: reading, writing, playing his trombone, hiking, biking, kayaking, gardening, and a variety of volunteer work at MGLP and Brasstown Bald in Georgia.

He conducts interpretive walks at MGLP, which include information about the cultural and natural history of this area, environmental and conservation issues, and a few entertaining poems. He considers himself an amateur naturalist with an eagerness to continue learning about the natural world around us. His passion for nature is reflected in his poetry and he enthusiastically writes articles on a wide range of topics that we are thrilled to share in this newsletter!

An Incidental Benefactor (continued) by Steve Franklin

I think it's important to recall that during the late 1800s any kind of travel other than by sea or rail was very difficult and cumbersome. Automobiles were not under mass production and aviation was yet to be considered viable. Therefore, plant explorers like Dr. David Fairchild, and later, Frank Meyer, traveled on foot, on mule back, in rickshaws, or in whatever manner was practiced by the locals in the countries they explored. Air conditioning had not yet been conceived, and illnesses like plagues, malaria, and cholera were sometimes running rampant in the countries where they traveled. Also,



Frank Meyer and Dr. David Fairchild

neighboring countries or local tribes might be at war, and safe-to-consume food and water might be difficult at best to procure. So these plant explorers, like other explorers before them, had to be extremely brave, resourceful, curious, and motivated adventurers in order to make many of the discoveries that they eventually did.

Following are a few examples of some of the hardships, illnesses, and misadventures that Fairchild endured as a plant explorer. While crossing the Andes on a mule his animal slipped on ice but miraculously saved itself and Fairchild from "...plunging down a thousand-foot abyss." He was introduced to cajeput oil while suffering an attack of malaria. Coincidentally, it is produced from the leaves of the melaleuca tree, which he later helped John Gifford disseminate throughout South Florida. This discovery, unfortunately, led to the State of Florida now spending millions of dollars each year to try and eradicate the trees, which are soaking up the water from the Everglades. In Ceylon he "came down with a severe attack of typhoid fever." In 1902, while on his way to Bagdad, he was told he would have to be vaccinated before he would be allowed on the ship for the trip up the Persian Gulf. Upon reaching the messy back yard of the superintendent of vaccinations he decided he "...was indeed on the outskirts of civilization..." when he was shown to a hinged-top table to which a calf was strapped. By tipping the table, scabs on the belly of the calf would be allowed to seep their fluids into an open wound made on his arm by the native doctor's dirty tools. This was supposed to inoculate him against the plague so he could visit "...the greatest date garden in the world."

In Bagdad Fairchild did more than just visit a date garden. He collected date suckers and "...every variety of grain I saw: wheat, barley, millet, gram, chick-peas, and...a poor variety of maize to show how inferior it was." Most of these items, some weighing 30 pounds or more, he packed himself to assure that they were properly labeled and that they'd arrive in Washington intact. He wrote

detailed notes about his work "...by the light of half a dozen tallow candles on the aft deck..." of the paddle wheel boat upon which he returned to Basra.

Life as a plant explorer wasn't always a romantic adventure. While visiting islands of the Java Sea in early 1900 Fairchild noticed that "...life on a small island appears in one's dreams as something peculiarly delightful, but actuality proves strangely disappointing. A small island is apt to become merely a prison. The fact that one cannot escape from it at will produces an increasing feeling of oppression."

Plant exploration involved a lot of hard work, and sometimes its results were disappointing. After proudly introducing Jordan almonds from Spain to California growers, Fairchild was both disappointed that the almonds didn't grow as well in California and at the same time somewhat relieved since this meant that the poor people of Almogia, Spain didn't lose their chief means of earning an income to competition in the states. He wrote, "As no two spots on the earth's surface have identical soil and climatic conditions, the hope of absolutely duplicating a fruit grown in one locality by growing the same variety in another is a futile one."

As I said earlier, resourcefulness was a key element of any good plant explorer's character. In Saigon, in 1902, with very little time left before his boat departed, he bought about 100 Cambodia mangos at a market-place, and then stopped at a bazaar to buy six scrubbing brushes before returning to his hotel. He asked the head-porter to find him six "boys" to eat the mangos and scrub the seeds. Soon the seeds were packed in charcoal and ready to be shipped, but his hotel room was a mess that he felt just couldn't have been avoided if he were to accomplish his mission there in the time allotted. The story of Dr. David Fairchild, plant explorer, continues in the next Beautyberry Post.

Frank Meyer/Dr. David Fairchild photo credit; USDA archives

Look for the final installment of *An Incidental Benefactor* in the May/June issue of Beautyberry Post.

Do you know how to say Mackay? "mac-EYE"



About the author:

Molly Griner, 2012 Polk County Master Gardener Volunteer of the Year, has devoted 13 years to educating Polk County residents about sustainable approaches to landscaping and gardening through Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles. She is a prolific writer with articles appearing in The Ledger newspaper and other publications. Molly also designed the foundation plantings around the Mackay house several years ago after researching what plants might have been used historically. Molly somehow finds time to also enjoy reading, crafts, painting, and gardening in her own yard!

This is the final installment of this article. Please refer to the Beautyberry Post January/February 2016 issue for the first installment.

LANDSCAPE PLANTS OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY – (and “what goes around, comes around”!) (continued)

By Molly Griner



Yellow tabebuia tree

TREES/PALMS: It is not surprising to learn that early landscapes used mostly Florida’s native trees. Oak varieties were very popular, especially live oaks which were chosen for their stature, adaptability to local growing conditions, relative lack of disease and pest problems, and long life expectancy. Cypress, native holly varieties, cedar, magnolia, wax myrtle, maple, fringe tree, redbud, Chickasaw plum, and varieties of pine were also used. As time progressed, non-native tree varieties were introduced from all

corners of the world. The use of imported flowering trees exploded in Florida landscapes. In our area, many proved to be too tender to survive our sporadic freezes. Many are still popular, including crape myrtle, tea olive, jacaranda, tabebuia, and bottlebrush tree.



Pink tabebuia tree

Most landscapes in these early years included many varieties of **fruit trees**, with citrus being a highly prized addition to home yards. Early newcomers to Florida were thrilled with the experience of walking out of their kitchen doors and hand-picking fresh and delicious fruit. Indeed, this is still true! Other valuable fruit trees included fig, mango, guava, loquat, carambola, Surinam and Barbados cherry, and avocado. We do know that the Mackay family garden included an avocado grove. Citrus, avocados, guavas, loquats, a Surinam cherry hedge, and longan and lychee trees still exist in the landscape near the house.



Willowleaf Mandarin Orange



Palms were extremely popular in these early years, as they were prevalent and imparted the true “Florida” look. Native palms, such as cabbage (sabal), dwarf cabbage, palmetto, and needle palm were used extensively. The Florida native coontie (a cycad) was also used. Imported palms included European fan palm, Chinese fan palm, Washingtonia, date palm, pindo palm, lady palm, Phoenix species, fishtail and Gru-Gru. The Sago palm (an introduced cycad) was also popular.

Gru gru palm

Many of the landscapes plants used in early central Florida homes have become successful stalwarts of today’s landscapes; “proven winners” of our landscaping world. They had to be since horticultural practices in these early years were quite different than for today’s average homeowner. Plants in these early years of landscaping had to thrive without the benefit of extensive irrigation, as well as without regular use of supplemental chemicals, such as fertilizers and pesticides.

Developments in later decades of the 20th century saw the creation of readily available synthetic chemicals promoted for the growth and maintenance of landscape plants. In addition, as automatic watering systems became popular, homeowners in Florida became increasingly reliant upon supplemental landscape irrigation. And yet, current trends in landscaping and gardening are shifting. As conservation awareness has awakened in our Florida homeowners, both in terms of water conservation and a desire to decrease pollution from excess chemical use, this has led to an ever-increasing interest in a more conservative and sustainable approach to landscape plant selection and maintenance; an approach that interestingly marks a return to the horticultural practices of these early years!

Many of the same early successful landscape plants – both Florida native as well as non-invasive (or “Florida-Friendly”) plants – are still being recommended today, which shows the enduring quality of these wonderful, easy-to-grow plants for Central Florida. As they say, “What goes around, comes around”!

One highly successful program that promotes sustainable landscaping techniques is the FLORIDA-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPING™ program, developed by the University of Florida, Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS). The principles of this sustainable approach to landscaping and gardening have been referred to as “gardening like our grandparents did”!

The principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ are promoted by Florida Master Gardeners. Information on Florida-Friendly guidelines and recommended plants can be found online at <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/>. Call the Polk County Extension Office in Bartow for a schedule of free programs being offered in your area. That number is 863-519-8677.

Recent Happenings



Attendance to ongoing educational presentations given at the house and nature walks through the Gardens and Preserve has remained good. Members of the **Planters Garden Club** of Winter Haven invited the public to join them in January for a presentation given by **Juliet Rynear** on *Rare Plant Conservation and the Importance of Volunteerism*. Juliet is Executive Assistant and Conservation Committee Chair of the Florida Native Plant Society.

The **Winter Haven Garden Club** requested a tour of the Gardens also in January. Inside the house Steve Franklin shared environmental and Mackay family history. Cathy Butcher led the tour through the Gardens sharing her knowledge of the heritage and native plants while tossing in a few tidbits of Florida-Friendly gardening suggestions.





Another round of chemical treatment within the Preserve to control invasive exotic plants has been completed. Certain plants threaten to disrupt the natural and unique, ecosystems of the property. This concludes a second year of treating plants such as rosary pea, cat's claw, camphor trees, and queen palms to halt their spread. This project has been made possible through **FWC grant** funding. The problem of invasive species is not unique to Florida. It will require public awareness, action, and vigilance to maintain a healthy balance in our habitats throughout all the states. As undesirable plants are removed at MGLP, an attempt is being made to reestablish displaced native species.

One of these displaced species, **blue lupine**, a native wildflower, was reintroduced to a section of scrub habitat in the Preserve that is in relatively good natural condition.

This area was part of a prescribed burn done by Florida Forestry last summer. **Juliet Rynear, Theresa Lutz**, and Cathy Butcher carefully planted prepared seeds in marked rows for monitoring over the next two weeks. These seeds were collected last summer from a handful of declining plants trying to compete with exotic, invasive plant neighbors in altered habitat of the Preserve. As of this writing about 24 seedlings have germinated at their new location!

Baby blues aren't the only lupines germinating at MGLP. Around 16 **scrub lupines** have germinated at this time in the scrub lupine reintroduction site. Historically these rare pink-



flowering lupines have only grown in specific locations of central Florida. Volunteers recently added about **90 native scrub plants** to the site (see flags) in an attempt to revive and promote the unique diversity found in scrub habitats. Ridge Ranger/Mackayster volunteers; Lois Smith, Theresa Lutz, and Jerry Burns carefully weeded the site and added the native plants under the supervision of Juliet Rynear.