

# BEAUTYBERRY POST

THE NEWSLETTER OF MACKAY GARDENS AND LAKESIDE PRESERVE

September-October / 2014



## **In Touch** By Steve Franklin

For those of us fortunate enough to be residents of Polk County, it's common place to live within minutes of one of our many beautiful lakes. Every day we pass by them and they seem never to lack for the element that makes them what they are, an inviting body of fresh water. I've been told that they indicate the level of the water table wherever they are found, that most of them are almost non-porous basins whose levels are determined by rates of evaporation and rain, and that some are also supplied water through creeks and canals, whose sources are watershed areas like the Green Swamp. During the summer, when afternoon thunderstorms are a fairly regular occurrence or when the occasional tropical storm or hurricane wanders by, our lakes reach peak levels. As we move around our water-soaked county at this time of year it's natural for us to assume that we'll never experience a water

shortage like people are dealing with in other parts of our nation. However, since most of the water we use comes from the Floridan aquifer this assumption may be a common misperception.

In a recent AARP Bulletin the question is posed: Should the State of Florida lure more retirees? For that matter, should we lure more people to move to Florida at all? It goes without saying that growth is inevitable, but can it be properly managed? When Native Americans first began occupying this area, unbeknownst to them they were moving onto land which overlay one of the largest underground aquifers in the world, but only small bands of them migrated here at a time. Now, "Some environmentalists worry that with 19.5 million people, according to the Census Bureau's 2013 estimate, Florida has more residents than the land can support," says the AARP Bulletin. If you've read anything about the decrease in volume of water leaving some of our most well-known springs, or been there and seen the algae floating up from the spring openings, (possibly a result of too many nutrients making their way down to the aquifer from pastures, residential lawns, and storm drain runoff), you too might be concerned.

I believe there is still hope for sustainability with growth. It comes in the form of modified living arrangements---more stacking, less sprawl---and a commitment by everyone concerned to the concept of Florida- Friendly Landscaping™ as proposed by the University of Florida and our county extension services. At least two thirds of our water consumption takes place in the form of irrigation. By choosing to alter our concepts of what constitutes an eye-pleasing, acceptable landscape plan we can sustain growth much longer, without shortages of water and the restrictions and higher prices per gallon that naturally follow. Why not attend a Master Gardener Seminar at Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve at 10:00 AM on the first Thursday of each month to learn ways you can help avoid the undesirable consequences of population growth while keeping Florida beautiful and critter friendly.

**Top photo: A view of the water garden at Mackay Historical Gardens, now called the Grotto.**

**Did you know? Mackay is pronounced "mac-EYE"**

## **A Lovely Place** By Cathy Butcher

Grotto is defined as a small cave or cavern. As a landscaping feature it is often a sunken garden offering a secluded retreat for quiet companionship or peaceful solitude. Does Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve have a grotto? Why yes, it does!

Often referred to as the sunken garden by volunteers early on we now call it the Grotto to differentiate from another possible sunken garden elsewhere on the property. The Mackay family called it the water garden. It has been a source of wonder and curiosity not only for the volunteers working to maintain it but also to visitors who discover its location on the property.

The entrance leads down into an excavated depression large enough to contain a concrete pool formed into circular sections, one large and one small. The small pool still holds water and contains some water plants but the larger pool is cracked and damaged. Old photos show the pools in all their glory brimming with water lilies and plantings around the edges.



Plants still exist in the Grotto that are on the Garden's plant list from the 1930's. Several species of palms, gardenias, bleeding heart, bromeliads, gingers, and a silk floss tree are some of the older plantings still surviving.

And then there are the vines. Numerous vines were planted. Possibly the idea was to establish them around the rim with the idea that they would drape down over the clay walls. But vines desire to grow up and over. These rambunctious beauties race toward nearby

trees covering anything in their path. Constant vigilance is necessary to control their spread. Many thanks to Mackayster volunteer, Tom Zimmers, who devotes most of his work year-round to weed control and vine maintenance in the Grotto.

The vines can produce a stunning display of color. A cascading blue wall greets visitors when the blue sky vine is blooming. If you look closely within you may see the cream flowers of the silver lace vine attempting to compete. Along the rim you will also notice the sprawling Chinese hat, a shrubby bush with long, arching branches that display delicate orange-red bracts several months of the year. Scarlet passion vines climb through the nearby powderpuff bushes. A leaning volunteer oak tree supports the wooly congea vine which forms a pink and white blanket of color during mild winters. Chinese wisteria and white herald's trumpet claim the opposite bank with their fragrant blooms.

The Grotto has been an enormous challenge to maintain.



Initial work consisted of clearing debris left behind from our three famous hurricanes; Charley, Francis, and Jean. Identification of plant species preceded careful work to establish a more “groomed” and controlled appearance. Unfortunately, cleaning up this area also opened it up to curious mischief-makers who took advantage of its relative seclusion to do damage to plants and the pools. A lovely light pink camellia and unusual white poinsettia no longer exist in the Grotto due to vandals. Other damaged plants were salvaged and removed by Mackayster volunteers until healthy specimens could be returned and replanted. Portions of the concrete pool have been damaged and a concrete bench, discovered underneath inches of leaf litter and returned to a usable position, was eventually destroyed. The vine-covered bank has been used as a slide.

These actions have been disheartening but our hope is that increased visitor traffic will deter future destruction. Please visit the Grotto and observe the good progress being made. Volunteers are adding new plants and more improvements are being planned for this special area. A recent visitor exclaimed, “If I were getting married, I would choose this lovely place!”

# Photo Gallery



A view from above of the pools; Handheld silk floss tree bloom; Dazzling scarlet passion vine flowers; Large leaves of the Swiss cheese plant; Entry into the Grotto; Stately white poinsettia; Delicate Chinese hat bracts.



Photos by Cathy Butcher

## **Calendar of Events**

### **September 2014**

- 9/3 -8AM Mackay work day. Work in scrub lupine plot with Juliet Ryneer, Bok Tower Rare Plant Specialist.
- 9/4 -10AM First Thursday Workshop- Landscaping With Edible Plants
- 9/17 -9AM Mackay work day
- 9/24 -9AM Mackay work day
- Tuesdays & Thursdays Zumba classes 6-7PM, pending availability of room, small fee required for this event

### **October 2014**

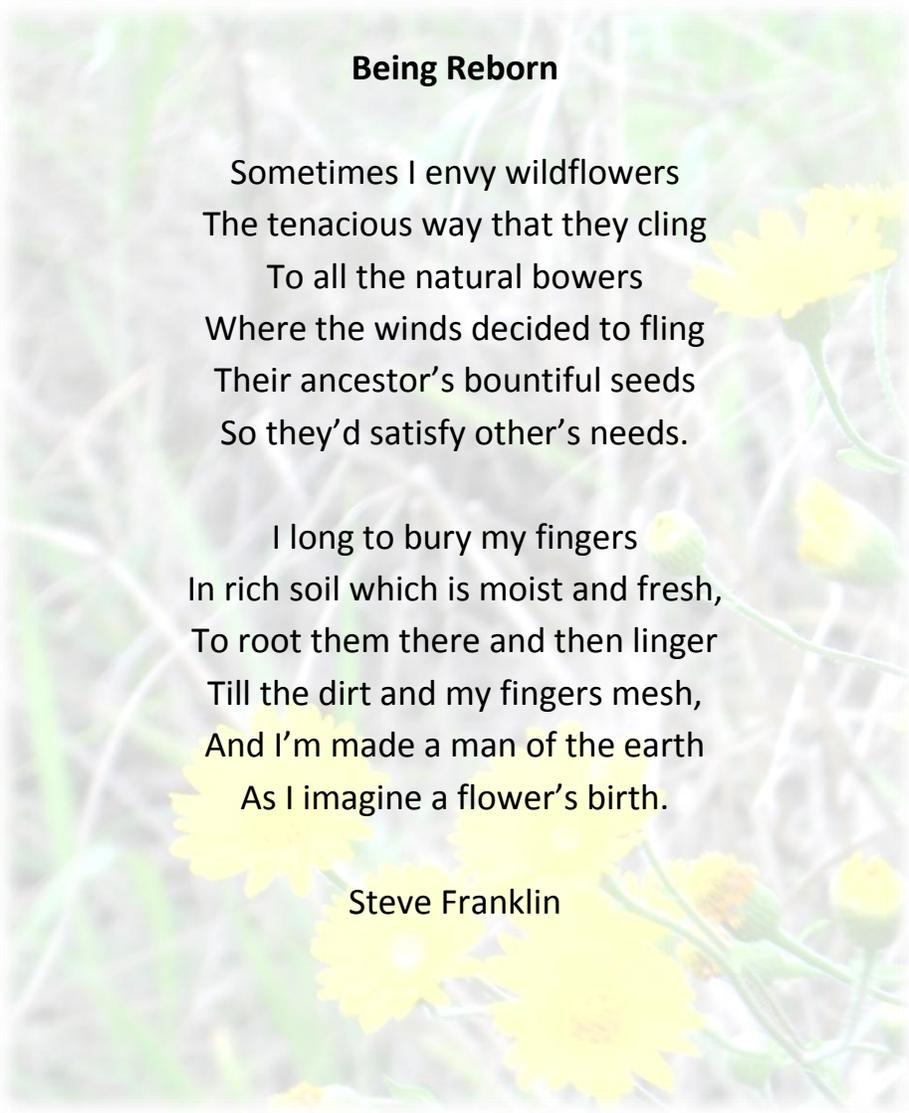
- 10/1- 9AM Mackay work day
- 10/2- 10AM First Thursday Workshop- Florida-Friendly Landscaping™
- 10/8-9AM Mackay work day
- 10/15-9AM Mackay work day
- 10/22-9AM Mackay work day
- 10/29-9AM Mackay work day
- Tuesdays & Thursdays Zumba classes 6-7PM, pending availability of room, small fee required for this event

## **First Thursday Workshops**

**Landscaping With Edible Plants** On September 3rd join us to learn how to creatively incorporate delicious edible plants into your landscape, bypassing the need for a traditional garden layout. Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Coordinator, Anne Yasalonis, will present an original program on this timely and extremely useful topic. Even if you live within a city you can save on your grocery bill, choose chemical-free options, and know exactly where your food is coming from while adding eye appeal and real food value to your yard.

**Florida- Friendly Landscaping™** by Master Gardener Debra Howell. October 2<sup>nd</sup> come and learn what Florida- Friendly means or refresh your knowledge of the nine principles of Florida-Friendly Gardening that teach how to save water, time, and expense, while gardening in an environmentally sustainable way.

First Thursday Workshops at MGLP are hosted by Polk Master Gardeners Pat Farris and Debra Howell. Join us in the Mackay house at 10AM for these free presentations.



## Being Reborn

Sometimes I envy wildflowers  
The tenacious way that they cling  
To all the natural bowers  
Where the winds decided to fling  
Their ancestor's bountiful seeds  
So they'd satisfy other's needs.

I long to bury my fingers  
In rich soil which is moist and fresh,  
To root them there and then linger  
Till the dirt and my fingers mesh,  
And I'm made a man of the earth  
As I imagine a flower's birth.

Steve Franklin

### **History** By Steve Franklin

In 1887, after the people of Florida finally began to recover from the deprivations of the Seminole Indian Wars and the Civil War they joined a new boom, the demand for timber. They began the wholesale stripping of trees from their land. Longleaf pines in particular were in great demand as they were large, durable, and could serve a wide variety of purposes.

By late 1887 the railroad had come through the area, which would later become known as the City of Lake Alfred, and it connected Tampa to Sanford, two busy shipping towns. McCray and Woodburn Company, later known as the Lake Alfred Lumber Company, established a lumber mill, turpentine still, and crate mill on the southwest side of town. They logged the

surrounding land until 1907 at which time it was logged out. The longleaf pine community had been systematically decimated, and with it gone probably several species of plants and animals also vanished.

While the logging was going on some of the company's Armenian workers planted two 40-acre tracts of citrus groves, which proved to be very productive. When the loggers moved on the J.C. Cox family acquired the groves. These thriving groves inspired the Gardener family and some of their partners from Fargo, North Dakota to purchase 5000 acres and develop the Florida Fruitlands Company, whose activities were largely responsible for the formation of the City of Lake Alfred. Over the years the area had been transformed from a country of small farms and cattle ranches occupying sandhills and sandpine scrub communities to a center for citrus production.

The town was known at one time or another as New Armenia, Wahnetta, Chubb, or Bartow Junction (because it lay at the junction of a road leading south to the county seat). The city was incorporated in 1913 as Fargo, but in 1915, due to mix-ups at the post office caused by the close resemblance of the town's name to that of the city of Largo, the city's name was changed to Lake Alfred. It was named after a large lake, which had previously been named to honor Mr. Alfred Parslow, an early settler and proponent of railroads.

Historian, Henry Adams, once wrote, "Chaos was the law of nature. Order was the dream of man." Emily Dickenson put it another way in one of her poems when she said, "A little madness in the Spring/ Is wholesome, even for the King/ But God be with the clown/ Who ponders this tremendous scene/ This whole experiment of green/ As if it were his own." Businessmen didn't see the wholesale destruction of natural resources which seemed unlimited in quantity as a dangerous practice that would eventually lead to serious environmental problems. Then as now jobs and profits seemed the most important components of growth. Concerted efforts to conserve forests didn't begin until the early 1900's when the connections between forests, water, and people became plainly evident. The Weeks Act of 1911 permitted the federal government to purchase land to protect the headwaters of rivers and watersheds and thereby slow the progress of serious ecological and public health problems.

## **Recent Happenings**

Though our hot summers represent the least active time of each year for obvious reasons, we do have some news to report. For the past three years the City of Lake Alfred Summer Camp program has made a morning at Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve one of the many fun activities they offer the kids. This year three different nature-based programs were presented concurrently throughout the morning. The children were divided into three smaller groups and rotated through each of the presentations. In the Mackay house, children's book author and nature lover, Terri Kowalski and her assistant Richard put on a presentation about pollinators. This included lots of fun as Richard played the part of Disk Jockey, Mr. Beethoven, and spun "Flight of the Bumblebee" while the kids played musical flowers. There

were prizes for every one who participated. While that was going on another group was enjoying a hands- on course in vermiculture. Polk Master Gardeners Kathy Kibler, Carol Ann Huffman, and Pat Farris presented earth worm farming in the picnic shelter. We're told that Pat was so into the program that she actually consumed one of the worms, which is something Kathy usually does at these programs. Wow! With the other two programs in progress Steve Franklin led the rest of the kids on a short hike to our outdoor classroom where he talked about gopher tortoises, a keystone species being protected at Mackay. The second half of the hike included a visit to an active gopher tortoise burrow. At the end of the morning, camp counselors commented on how interesting and fun this year's programs were. We're greatly indebted to these super volunteers who took time off from their regular routines to organize and present such fine educational programs.

It's with mixed feelings that we announce the departure of Parks and Recreation Manager, Jeff Tillman. Jeff has accepted a position as assistant to the city manager in Kissimmee, Florida. We'll miss his good humor and enthusiasm for the work here. Jeff's job in Lake Alfred entailed not only the management and improvement of Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve, but all of the parks in town and the programs associated with each. The city has seen many improvements to these parks and programs during Jeff's time here. Thank you Jeff, and best wishes from all of us.



**This newsletter is edited by Cathy Butcher with assistance from Steve Franklin. Please send remarks and suggestions to: [cassiebelle@verizon.net](mailto:cassiebelle@verizon.net). Include Beautyberry Post in your subject line. Visit the City of Lake Alfred's website, for more information on upcoming events or to view a colorful video presentation on Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve. Volunteers are needed for: maintenance in the gardens and preserve; assisting with educational seminars and nature hikes; creating environmental or historic displays; helping to build outdoor projects; and to develop and facilitate fund-raising ideas. If you have questions about volunteering please contact the above email or Parks and Recreation of Lake Alfred at [AQuinoes@mylakealfred.com](mailto:AQuinoes@mylakealfred.com) or Phone: 863-291-5272. Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve is located in the City of Lake Alfred, Florida at 900 Mackay Blvd., 33850. It is free and open 7 days a week!**