



THE PAWPAW PRESS

Newsletter of the Pawpaw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society: April 2018

Fired up about fire

Zach Prusak, fire manager of The Nature Conservancy's Florida program, spoke to the chapter at its April meeting about the importance of controlled burns to maintain the fire-dependent ecosystems that are abundant in our state.

Sweet acacia: Yellow powderpuffs and "thorns" galore

The April plant in the chapter's "Prickly Plants for Pollinators and Privacy" feature was sweet acacia (*Vachellia farnesiana* var. *farnesiana*). The term acacia is derived from the Greek word "akis," meaning a point or barb. These shrubs to small trees have zig-zag branches with spinescent stipules that appear as whitish thorns, appropriate for this year's plant of the month theme.

Sweet acacia is a shrub to small tree growing to 20 feet tall and 6 to 10 feet wide with many branching trunks, lending itself to use as an open but impenetrable hedge and wildlife thicket. The feathery bi-pinnately compound leaves lend an interesting appearance as do the many yellow globular flowers on short stalks. The fruits are dark purplish-red pods with blunt tips about 2-3 inches long.

Ranging mostly in the shell middens, coastal hammocks, pinelands and disturbed sites of south and southwest Florida, they are also found in scattered central Florida and panhandle locations. Preferring full sun, sweet acacia can tolerate from average moisture to dry conditions and is highly salt tolerant, although there is a limit to how much salt wind it can take. Alkaline soil such as sand works best.

Sweet acacia is a larval host plant for the Ammon blue (*Cyclargus ammon*) and nickerbean blue/acacia blue (*Hemiargus ammon*) butterflies. It is also a favorite nectar plant of the red-banded hairstreak (*Calycopis cecrops*).

The specific name *farnesiana* is in honor of Odoardo Farnese (1573–1626) whose family maintained a private botanical garden in Rome and imported these trees from the Caribbean. Sweet acacia was used to make perfume and is still grown in southern France for that purpose.—Paul Rebmann



Rinker Pond project demonstrates power of natives

As an appetizer before the April meeting, Pawpaw members were invited by Bethune-Cookman University student Samuel Mwenda to tour a site on Ridgewood Avenue in South Daytona where native plants are being used to reduce the amount of nutrients and sediments flowing into the Halifax River. The project is spearheaded by B-CU working in conjunction with the City of South Daytona, the St. John's River Water Management District, YBE Environmental Consulting, and site contractors.

We look forward to following the progress of this ambitious project designed to benefit all who live along or near the Halifax River.—*Sande Habali*



Springfest on Canal Street in New Smyrna Beach

The chapter was happy to participate in New Smyrna Beach's Springfest on Canal Street on April 7, and even happier when we ended up in the Hometown News.

The Rugel's get counted, even without a Roundup

Although this year's expanded Rugel's Roundup to gather data on Volusia County's endemic Rugel's false pawpaw had to be called off

when a grant did not come through, Danny Young managed to commandeer a small team of field scientists for a *Deeringothamnus rugelii* survey on May 7.

Participants included Dr. Eliane Norman, a longtime Rugel's specialist; Jo Anna Emanuel with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Phil Gonsiska, a Bok Tower Gardens horticulturalist coming to take DNA samples; and Jaimie Fusco, a Nova University graduate student working with Bok Tower Gardens to take soil samples.

The group met at Tiger Bay State Forest, where the site's administrator, Donald King, guided the group to a location where *D. rugelii* had been previously documented. After scrambling through gallberry and saw palmetto



bushes, the group found about 30 plants. Data collection included taking leaf samples for DNA studies, as well as soil samples for microbial studies.

After a brief lunch break, the group moved to a site within the southern documented range for Rugel's, which proved to be a veritable bonanza. The group hopes to build on the groundwork done on this survey for a much-anticipated grant-funded Rugel's Roundup in 2019.

Although pawpaws are notoriously difficult to propagate, Dot Backes' has successfully reared a 2-year-old *Deeringothamnus rugelii* seedling, which has now been entrusted to the folks at Bok Tower to be part of their rare plant inventory. Way to go, Dot! For more on Pawpaw's propagator extraordinaire, see below. —Sonya Guidry



Hammock walk at Gamble Rogers

Gamble Rogers Memorial State Recreation Area in Flagler Beach has one of the last maritime hammocks on the Northeast Florida Coast. Fourteen Pawpaw "family and friends" gathered there on a bright, windy April 14 to take a walk on the Joe Kenner Nature Trail.

Outreach event in Ormond Beach

Leslie Nixon, master gardener and Pawpaw Chapter member, presented a program on the importance of wildflower pollinators to successful crop production at the May 12 Ormond Public Gardens Open House. Other Pawpaw Chapter participants in this event were Warren Reynolds, Dot Backes and Amelia Evans.



May field trip

Take a 10:00 a.m. tour of Carolyn Kieler's DeLand home landscape, have lunch at Cook's Buffet, and conclude with side trip to the Stetson campus, where Dr. Cindy Bennington will guide our walk through their pine sandhill restoration site

Please sign up for the trip to get directions, carpool information and make a reservation for lunch. Contact Sonya Guidry at (386) 690-1797 or guidry.sonya@gmail.com.

Additional upcoming events:

May 14 (Mon): Pawpaw meeting, Carolyn Kieler on transforming a "lawn-scape" into a natural landscape

May 17-20 (Thurs-Sun): FNPS Conference, Miami, Mikosukee Resort (<https://fnps.org/conference>)

May 21 (Mon): Park of Honor workday, Olive Stree, South Daytona

June 11 (Mon) Pawpaw meeting: Incoming FNPS President Susan Carr on pineland ecology and Hercules-club as plant of the month by Dot Backes

June 16 (Sat): Field trip to explore sandhill habitat at Tiger Bay State Forest. Contact: Warren Reynolds

June 18 (Mon): Park of Honor workday, Olive Street, South Daytona



Dot Backes, a real Florida native

Growing up rooted in the rural farming community of Sanford, Dot Backes developed a love of art, which compelled her into landscape painting throughout most of her life. In fact, one of her paintings will grace the cover of Dr. J. Cho's latest book, *Plants of Canaveral National Seashore*. The Pawpaw Chapter is also fortunate enough to be able to share a brochure Dot created for a master gardener course which contains identification tips and her sketches of Florida native pine trees.

Dot left Florida to attend college, get married, raise four sons, travel around the country, pursue a scientific career in a toxicology lab, and continue to paint, after which she and her husband returned to Florida to retire. Since her husband Frank's death, Dot hasn't painted much but has found a new passion for the propagation of native plants, including a 2-year-old Rugel's Pawpaw. Other new seedlings she is nurturing include four different kinds of milkweed (*Asclepias* spp.), skullcap (*Scutellaria* spp.), palafox (*Palafoxia* spp.), blazing-star (*Liatris* spp.), Tampa verbena (*Glandularia tampensis*), and greeneyes (*Berlandiera subauculis*), to name just a few.

Dot's backyard is a living landscape, filled with many types of native plants and the pollinators they attract. She has an uncanny ability to study the specific needs of each type of tiny plant and coax the next generation along.

This quiet woman embodies a wealth of wisdom and creativity, and the Pawpaw Chapter continues to be enriched by Dorothy Whitner Backes. —Sonya Guidry



Name tags are here

The long-aborning name tags are finally here, so if you signed up for one—and your membership is paid up—they will be available at the May meeting. This one's on us, but if you lose it, a replacement will cost you \$10. We will be ordering new ones periodically as merited by new members.