



Sandhills
Horticultural Gardens

The Bloomin' News

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The Sandhills Horticultural Society - dedicated to the support of the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens since 1987.

Cuba Yesterday and Today

Dee Johnson



I was fortunate to be able to visit Cuba shortly before there were scheduled regular flights to Havana. For some reason, I had always

wanted to visit the island that seemed so mysterious to me but was so close to the US. My Dad was there while in the Navy for his R and R. I had seen pictures of him there with his friends. I also remember as a young girl hearing about the Bay of Pigs and being very frightened about the Russians coming so close. Remember this island is only 228 miles from Miami. I wanted to see this island before it became filled with high rise tourist hotels.

This trip was organized by the American Botanical Garden Association on a people to people exchange program. I traveled with other plant geeks like myself to observe the sustainability practices of Cuba. Here was a country whose population lost an average of twenty pounds during what they called "the Special Period" (1989-late 1990) when the Soviet Union withdrew their support and petroleum. The population had to learn sustainable practices if they were going to survive.

Upon arriving we deplaned on the tarmac and walked into a one story building that is their airport. We waited about two and half hours for our luggage to appear on the one luggage carousel. Here we saw everything from tires to toys being brought into the country. We traveled by bus to a very nice hotel in the heart of Havana where we exchanged money. There are no charge cards in Cuba so cash is mandatory. Tourist use Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC) where most locals use Cuban Peso (CUP).

This is a very insular country; little from the outside world gets to the average person. I was able one time to get on the internet in the hotel lobby for about a minute. I did not see anything but a Cuban government printed newspaper while I was there. Even all the restaurants except one we visited were State owned.

Here are some basic facts about Cuba.

- 97% literacy rate
- Free School through College
- More doctors than most any country but average salary is \$30.00/month
- Average citizen salary is \$30-\$40.00 per month
- Very limited access to internet
- Government controls almost all businesses including newspapers
- Ration booklets started in 1962 and continue today
- Takes two days' wages for a bar of soap not on ration booklet

- Must retire at 65 and get your retirement salary of \$8.00 a month

Sustainability has become a way of life there for everything from food to hard goods. Little is thrown away. They recycle not by choice but because of necessity.

We visited what would be equivalent in the US to an agriculture research station. Sitting out front were five beautiful new tractors, a gift from France. They still had the plastic on them. I looked around them and saw a gentleman mowing with the most unusual antique mower I had ever seen. (See picture) It had been pieced together with various old parts. I asked why they were not using the tractors. They informed me they were for photo opportunities. They did not have sufficient fuel to run the tractors. This theme ran throughout our visit.

Visiting a community garden, we heard the same story. They had no fertilizer, no fuel and were saving seeds where ever they could find them. The oxen that plowed the field provided the fertilizer for the same field. Pest control was being done by beneficial insects that they raised on site. This community had taken an empty lot and started growing fruit and vegetables for the community. We saw this in many places around the outskirts of the city. These plots were also educating people to different food palates. Rice is a dietary staple in Cuba but they grow little rice and without this import the people have had to learn to eat other crops that they can grow, for example beets.

The National Botanical Garden of Cuba was located several miles outside of Havana. Without extra fuel people are not able to visit there very often. When we drove up in our bus the parking lot reminded me of a deserted amusement park, grass and weeds were growing everywhere and not a car in site. The garden is over 1,400 acres with many large trees and native plants. The Japanese Garden was long neglected, but men were out with machetes cutting the grass around the area.

I am so grateful that I could visit this country briefly and see the Cuba people working so hard to survive and make a life for themselves. It reminded me what drive and determination can do with very little resources. How many of us in the US have the knowledge and skill to feed our families from our back yards? Cuba is a country where the people had to learn this skill to survive.



Edible Landscapes

Johanna Westmen

The idea of edible landscapes has become ever so popular in recent years. So much so, that I have jumped on the bandwagon. Many of us have already been practicing this type of gardening by planting apple trees and other fruit trees in our landscapes for many years. What has happened is that nurseries and even mass merchandisers have realized the desire for edibles and they have now become easier and easier for us to find. It used to be that you would have to go to a nursery who specialized in fruit trees to obtain them, but luckily for us, that is no longer the case!

When you are thinking about edibles for your landscape, you should consider some general things. Do you have the space? Do you have enough light? Is your soil compatible for what you are considering growing? All these things are necessary for you to be successful in growing any type of plant, but for fruit production, they can be essential. Before you choose any edible for your garden, be sure you do your research to see exactly what its requirements are and if you can provide them in your specific landscape.

One of my favorite fruits to grow in my own landscape are blueberries. Luckily, for us, blueberries grow very well here in the Sandhills. Most people think blueberries are not a very attractive plant, but I totally disagree. I have one particular blueberry bush that 'appeared' in our front landscape. Instead of getting rid of it I decided to leave it alone and treat it with the same consideration as all the other 'chosen' plants that were there. Besides the fact that it provided me with over fifteen quarts of blueberries last year alone I find it quite beautiful. When it is blooming, I love the amount of pollinators it attracts and then in the fall the leaves take on a lovely red color. I have over twenty blueberry plants, but this particular one is probably my favorite because it decided to appear in the front landscape. In fact, it fit in so well that I decided to plant three more!

Horticulture Society Events and Workshops

Linda Hamwi

Now that 2016 is "in the books", it's time to look forward to what's going in 2017! Before I do that I should mention the final workshop of last year - Maggie Smith's Flower Arranging. This workshop is always popular and everyone went home filled with the spirit of the season and a beautiful Christmas arrangement! Maggie was kind enough to commit to another workshop next December.

Our first program of 2017 was a huge success! Taylor Williams, NC State Extension agent, gave his pruning workshop. It was standing room only and Taylor's presentation was full of information. He followed it with a walk through the Horticulture Gardens and gave several demonstrations pruning azaleas, crapemyrtles and blueberry bushes, among others. Although temperatures were "brisk", it was a gorgeous, sunny morning and the crowd of nearly 80 people followed him around the gardens wherever his pruner took him!!!

We have lots of exciting happenings at the Gardens. The Sandhills Horticultural Society sponsored its first Children's Art Competition & Exhibit February 4th through the 11th. We're very excited seeing children "interpret" nature through their artwork! On February 23rd, we have a tour of a hydroponic lettuce farm and on March 30th Bruce Fensley will demonstrate how to plant an earthbox. Our popular "Lunch & Learn" programs will start up again in March. These lectures are on the 4th Monday of the month.

I'd like to acknowledge Dolores Muller who has served as program director for the Sandhills Horticulture Society, and has now taken on the position of President, passing her "baton" on to me. Many of us, including myself, have enjoyed the workshops/events that Dolores has been responsible for. She has done a great job for the SHS and the entire community and I can only hope to do as well!

This year I have chosen to add pomegranate to my garden as well. We have grown them in the SCC gardens for several years now and I continue to be impressed with the number of pomegranates we get every year. They are just like the ones you buy in the grocery store - just as big and just as juicy! They may need an occasional pruning and they do have thorns (beware). But, they are definitely worth the time and effort if you enjoy their fruit. The flowers of the pomegranate are quite beautiful, orange-red in color!



Pomegranate Tree

New fruits for me this year include huckleberry, gooseberry and several varieties of plums. I have also been very lucky with fig trees. It may take a couple of years for you to obtain fruit from a fig tree, but I guarantee you it will be worth the wait. Other edibles, which I could easily recommend would be blackberries, grapes, raspberries, strawberries, pears and gogi berries. I am sure there are many more but these are some I have been successful with here in the Sandhills region. With some careful planning, edible plants can easily be included in your garden. Besides the rewards you receive from enjoying their fruits, their ornamental value will be appreciated as well.



Elaine and Jerry Schwartz

Crapemyrtles- To Prune or Not To Prune

Jim Westmen



Pruned correctly

There are many different thoughts on pruning crapemyrtles and for the most part it is not necessary to prune them at all. When deciding to prune any plant you should have a clear understanding as to the reason to prune and the results desired. The reasons for pruning can be very simple or more specific such as maintaining a certain size, particular shape or specific form such as a multi-trunk tree or single trunk (on standard) form. Also, there are many different sizes of crapemyrtle to choose, from very large varieties (25'-45') down to varieties under (3') in height. With

such a range of sizes, choosing the right size for a location is probably the first step as this could reduce the pruning needed to maintain a certain size.

Improving branch structure to support the weight of flowers and seed production is another reason to prune along with removal of dead, diseased or damaged branches. Any basal suckers should also be removed close to their origin. Possibly thin pruning in the canopy to allow sunlight penetration and air circulation to help reduce diseases like Powdery Mildew and insects like Aphids that can promote Sooty Mold would be another reason to prune. Most importantly, when selecting varieties of crapemyrtle you should try to choose disease resistant ones especially here with our very humid summers.

The term 'Crape Murder' is often used to describe the extreme and drastic amount of pruning done many times. Cutting back too far and stubbing large trunks really is unhealthy and unsightly. The pruning technique of Pollarding is removing all of the previous year's growth back to its origin resulting in a large knob of scar tissue resembling a knuckled fist. This look

is somewhat odd and ugly depending on what you're used to seeing. In European countries this practice is more common. Such severe pruning can result in additional insect problems from stressing the tree and structural problems from poorly attached new shoots.

Here in the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens we do prune some of our crapemyrtles each year. In the Sir Walter Raleigh Garden we use somewhat of a modified pollarding technique trying not to prune too severe creating those knobby ends. Instead we try to make cuts no larger than 1" on terminals and to thin out branches to their crotch as necessary with a hand saw. While it is not always possible to keep cuts small, the results are a more graceful appearance. Every three or four years we may have to prune a little heavier to control size. Many crapemyrtles around the Ball Visitor Center were pruned initially for the first five years to create a supportive branch structure and are no longer pruned annually.

The time to prune crapemyrtles is late winter to early spring prior to new growth. Remember that they bloom from the current season's growth, so no worries as to removing dormant flower buds. When crapemyrtles are pruned too early such as November or December the pruning wounds are left open for a longer period of time which can cause some problems. The added winter interest of the dried seed clusters is also lost.

Choosing the proper tools to prune is also important. Bypass hand pruners, loppers and a small pruning saw should be available. Remember to think personal safety and have some gloves and eye protection also. One poke in the eye by a small end of a branch is no fun.

Happy Pruning!



"Crape Murder"

Spring Garden Tips

- ❁ After danger of frost, interior plants may be moved outside to a shaded location.
- ❁ Plant cool season vegetables.
- ❁ Inspect your irrigation system for possible winter damage.
- ❁ Apply pre-emergent herbicide on warm season turf.
- ❁ Prune spring flowering shrubs, like forsythia and spirea, after they bloom.
- ❁ Clean ornamental ponds and repot any hardy aquatic plants.
- ❁ Plant summer annuals after the chance of frost has passed.



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Upcoming Events . . . March, April & May

Lunch & Learn

March 13 (Monday) Noon to 1PM – Ball Visitors Center

Jean Walker, Moore County coordinator for the North Carolina Bluebird Society will give you tips on **how to attract bluebirds**.

Bring your lunch and the Garden will provide drinks. FREE – register by email: landscapegardening@sandhills.edu

Planting an Earth Box

March 30 (Thursday) 10AM to Noon – Ball Visitors Center

Master Gardener Bruce Fensley will demonstrate how to grow vegetables, herbs and flowers in a limited space using earth boxes. Participants will be given an Ace Hardware discount coupon for an earth box and everything you'll need to plant your own box. Horticultural Society members \$10 – non-members \$15. Payment due at registration.

Sandhills Horticultural Society Spring Plant Sale

April 8 (Saturday) 8AM to Noon – Steed Hall

Perennials, woody plants and bulbs will be for sale. For information or to pre-order call 910-695-3882. Horticultural Society members receive 5% off orders of \$100 or more.

Flower Arranging

April 18 (Tuesday) 10AM to Noon – Ball Visitors Center

Tim Ward and Leslie Habets from South Street (formerly Aldena's) will conduct a hands-on workshop creating an arrangement using spring blooms and greenery. Participants will personalize each arrangement to express their own personality. Materials include a vase, flowers and greenery. Horticulture Society members \$45, non-members \$55. Space is limited to 30. Payment due at registration.

Annual Bedding Plant Sale – Benefits Student's Educational Field Trip

Friday April 21, 1PM to 5PM, Saturday, April 22, 9AM to 12PM – Steed Hall

Annuals, herbs, tomato and pepper plants are available. Pre-orders are recommended. Order forms are available at the Ball Visitors Center. Mail to SCC – Landscape Gardening, 3395 Airport Road, Pinehurst NC 28374. Email, johnsond@sandhills.edu, phone 910.695.3883 or fax 910.695.3894.

Lunch & Learn

April 24 (Monday) Noon to 1PM – Ball Visitors Center

JJ Faulk of JJ's Place Greenhouse & Nursery in Sanford will talk about **annuals and perennials in the landscape**. Bring your lunch. The Garden will provide drinks.

FREE – register by email: landscapegardening@sandhills.edu

Planting Summer Annuals

May 5 (Friday) 10AM to Noon – Steed Hall

This is a hands on workshop with instructors Linda Hamwi and Dolores Muller. Participants will be planting a unique coated wire cauldron that can either hang by its handle or stand on its legs. This is a piece you will re-use for years. You will select plants of your choice from Linda's "mini nursery" of summer annuals. All materials furnished, which includes cauldron w/liner, soil, plants and fertilizer. Horticulture Society members \$80, non-members \$90. Class is limited. Payment due at registration.

Lunch & Learn

May 22 (Monday) Noon to 1PM – Ball Visitors Center

Pete Gulley of Gulley's Garden Center in Southern Pines will talk about **your garden in the month of May**. Bring your lunch. The Garden will provide drinks.

FREE – register by email: landscapegardening@sandhills.edu