



Newsletter of the W. Gordon Belser Arboretum
Department of Biological Sciences, University of South Carolina
April 19, 2009

Spring at the W. Gordon Belser Arboretum: Spring was slow coming to Columbia, but finally in late March it danced into town with a magnificent display of dogwoods, cherries, clouds of azaleas, and a host of other flowers plus the welcome greenery of the unfurling leaves. Perhaps the even, plentiful rainfall of 2008 encouraged such a scenario. Many of the shrubs and trees of the Arboretum have matured enough during the past three years to bloom for the first time. Especially rewarding were the native azaleas in the CANDO Gardens and in the Native Azalea Garden above the Outdoor Classroom.

Visitation Opportunities at the Arboretum. Monthly Open Houses continue, along with the Volunteers Work Day each Wednesday during the hours from 7:30 am to 3 pm. The CANDO Garden crew will continue to meet on the Saturday immediately preceding the Open House: this month on April 18 from 8 am-11am. In addition, the Arboretum has begun to attract a number of groups of interns or community service groups from the University of South Carolina and other civic and club groups. To schedule such a group, call Pat or Valerie.

April Open House. The Arboretum will be open to the public for its Open House on April 19, 2009 from 1-4 pm. Visitors are welcome to walk along the Loop Trail and along the designated spur paths. For new developments, see below. The SFC Garden Club and Co-Op will meet at the Outdoor Classroom at 2 pm. Feel free to come with a plant for exchange or just to join the camaraderie of plant growers. The Arboretum will donate a few plants for those who don't have any extra plants ready for exchange yet.

New projects completed during the past month.

Major efforts have been directed for the past 3 months by our brush-clearing crew to the clearing of the stream and its banks from the spillway at the top down to the trail at the pool and Lower Waterfalls. This work is Phase I of our Richland County Conservation Commission Grant to restore the stream. We are happy to announce that with heroic effort, Gene, Clayton, and Pat removed untold truckloads of brush, branches, dead trees, and logs to clear some of the densest grown and tree-fall of the entire

Arboretum. We turned in our Quarterly Report to the Richland County Conservation Commission with a week to spare, and were given an enthusiastic approval for the work and report. We hope you enjoy the new view and the spectacular flowers that have returned after the clearing (see below).

The second even more heroic effort has been the clearing of the trail-side border of unwanted vegetation and truckloads of giant catbriar tubers to make space for our new Trailside Garden border. Some 750 sapling trees, under-story shrubs and groundcover flowers have been planted in the past few weeks, most of them along the trail border. You will see a colored plastic tape or flag for each new planting. These help us avoid stepping on a small plant and keep us alert about watering needs of the newly planted items. Some of these new plantlets are protected with upended squirrel cages. All of the plastic markers and the squirrel cages are purely temporary to help these new plantings get safely started. Imagine the picture in a year or two as the plants grow to maturity.

Visitor groups at the Arboretum during the past month. Mid-March to mid April has been peak bloom time at the Arboretum, and the visitors have come in large numbers:

Crape Myrtle Garden Club,

Our English Department Poetry-Writing and Essay Classes

Hunting Creek Garden Club

Interns from Political Science 122, and several other USC classes

Visitors from Harmony School

One group of 42 cancelled due to the tornado warning on the scheduled day!

Trail “Walk Around” to see new items and projects. Starting at the Bloomwood Gate, look for the spectacular blooming native azaleas and cross vines in the CANDO Garden. The Horseshoe Garden is full of blooming plants and newly emerging plants. On the lower slopes of the Pine Plantation are many new Trailside garden plants. Near the Materials Depot at the Trailhead, we are starting to plant trees in the trench, which was filled with red clay fill dirt in August 2006; only now after 3 years of mellowing has it become usable for planting. We will decommission the Supply Depot in the next few months as we enter Phase II of stream restoration and use up all the bricks, gravel, stones etc. At the Outdoor Classroom, look for the native plant border, now thriving and in bloom. At the spring, be certain to look carefully for the 4 colonies of ethereal wild Easter lilies on the stream bank. Admire, also, the now clear view up the stream. Near the pool and waterfall, note the two new, exquisite fern gullies, rescued from over-riding ivy, non-native honeysuckle, catbriar, and other weeds. On the steep bank approaching the Wilmot Gate, the Carolina All Spice bushes are in spectacular bloom. In the Chestnut Grove the sapling chestnut trees are leafing out, and in the Beech/Maple forest the beech trees, ironwood trees, and sugar maple trees are happily leafing out. Greenery has returned to the Cypress Swamp as the saplings grow their summer needles and reach heights of 14-20 feet. Finally, admire the impressive “growth candles” on the pines.

Wish List: Volunteers to help pull the aggressive Asian honeysuckle, a source of good chip mulch for our trail, donations for our Endowment campaign. Thanks.

We hope you enjoy your visit to the Arboretum and find peace and tranquility there.