

Exotic Bromeliads Are Easy to Care For

by Tyler Carr

Most Louisiana plant enthusiasts are familiar with bromeliads, whether it's the classic Silver Vase from a florist or the pass-a-long plant Queen's Tears. They offer an exotic, tropical look in an easy-to-care-for package. Most bromeliads are epiphytic in the wild, which means that they grow on other plant surfaces and derive their moisture and nutrients from the air, rain or water in the cup or central part of the plant. Thus, they can handle periods without water, making them ideal for indoor culture. However, it should be noted that in south Louisiana, we have near ideal conditions for exterior culture, too! From April to October, gardeners can use these beauties in their landscape or on their patio without worry! Although most prefer shady locations, some will be able to tolerate morning and some midday sun. Many different genera of bromeliads are available, but the best (and prettiest) ones available to most homeowners are from *Aechmea*, *Billbergia* and *Neoregelia*. *Ananas* (or Pineapple) gets an honorable mention because it is available at almost any grocery store.

Aechmea is a vase-shaped bromeliad that gets its name from the Greek word for spear, referring to their spear-shaped inflorescence, or flowering structure. Most *Aechmea* have green foliage, but some, like *A. blanchetiana*, have beautiful rosy hues ranging from oranges and yellows to brilliant reds and merlots! These bromeliads will like shady areas of your yard and will also do well on your patio. The only real exception would be *A. blanchetiana*, which can tolerate morning and midday sun. *Billbergia*, also known as Queen's Tears, is a bromeliad that many will already be semi-acquainted with in south Louisiana. Treated as a pass-a-long plant for many years, breeders have been making strides with coloring and flowering, offering new looks to this old classic. The flutelike shape is complemented by the



Mix of variegated bromeliads from breeder Chester Stotak

hanging flowers, usually with shades of blue and purple petals. *Billbergia* Hallelujah has great coloration, with deep reds and pinks and bright cream spots. *Neoregelia* is another genus that will do well in Louisiana gardens. This type of bromeliad has a rosette arrangement of leaves that sport amazingly diverse patterns with variegation, spots, stripes, streaks, bands and bars! Flowers will be less showy than other bromeliads, but what they lack in inflorescence they more than make up for in color. They can handle morning sun but will grow best in dappled light.

When it comes to landscaping or gardening with bromeliads, there are really three major options. First is in a container on your patio. It is best to continue to grow bromeliads in their original nursery container and just slip the container into a decorative pot for something nicer looking. If you choose to transplant a bromeliad into a new container you will need to purchase the appropriate soilless potting mix that is well drained and helps prevent rotting

continued on page 6



Reflections From the Chair

Leigh Harris

Chair, Friends of LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens at Burden

Whether as a gardener, nature lover, hiker, birder, parent or simply someone interested in soaking up Louisiana’s wonderful green spaces, you know the value of the LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens at Burden. You know the beauty and serenity of the Botanic Gardens in the heart of the city. I’m frequently surprised at Baton Rouge residents and friends who are unaware of this wonderful space. Those of us who have “found” the Botanic Gardens take pleasure in the opportunities it offers.

I’m honored to serve as chair of the Friends of LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens at Burden this year and to share with other Friends the opportunities to volunteer and help maintain this spectacular property.

Join me in thanking Mary Tharp for chairing the Friends board during the highly challenging past year as we all learned to pivot and to adapt. Her calm cheerfulness and attention to detail enabled Mary to host those pesky virtual board meetings seamlessly until we could be together again, and we are most grateful.

Before summer descended in earnest, we enjoyed a beautiful springtime, made more thrilling because we were finally free to safely leave our homes and venture back into the gardens.

As activities began reopening, the popular first-Monday Reflections in the Gardens started meeting physically, albeit with limited audiences. This educational series continues, now at full capacity, with engaging speakers and topics. Beekeeping expert (and Friends board member) Kevin Langley shared the truly fascinating world of the honeybee with attendees in May. Also, the executive directors of Bellingrath Gardens in Mobile and of the New Orleans Botanical Garden in City Park each described how their respective historic gardens evolved into beloved Southern showplaces.

On a perfect spring weekend in May, Go Public Gardens Days drew individuals and families for two days of guided tours on the property, StoryTime in the Garden and other children’s activities, and even fitness classes. Historic Windrush Gardens was open for tours, as well as for picnicking or just meandering.

Now as we find ourselves in the middle of the sweltering summer, we look forward to an active fall being planned by the wonderful Burden Museum & Gardens staff and volunteers. Upcoming activities include:

- For families, and especially the youngest members, Corn Maze takes place over the five Saturdays in October. Hayrides, games, pumpkins galore and a petting zoo are only a few of the activities that attendees have come to anticipate. Night Maze on the final Saturday brings the traditional bonfire and nighttime fun.

- This year Wine & Roses takes a completely new approach. An elegant brunch on Sunday, Nov. 7 will include food, drink and entertainment at four different stations in the Botanic Gardens. More information will be forthcoming, and tickets will go on sale soon.

For now, I invite you to come out and spend time. The woodland trails offer a cool breather from the heat, perfect for leisurely hiking and perhaps some bird-watching. There’s always something to experience, to enjoy and to learn.

Bring a friend to introduce to the Botanic Gardens. Consider becoming a volunteer. Join the Friends of LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens, where I guarantee you’ll meet some of the nicest people!

Looking forward to seeing you soon in the Botanic Gardens.

Friends of LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens at Burden

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LSUAgCenter.com/BotanicGardens

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Louisiana Stormwater Coalition Aims to Improve Baton Rouge Wetlands

By Jeff S. Kuehny

During our childhood and into our teens, my brother and I spent many hours roaming my grandparents' farm in Oklahoma, which was very similar to the Burden Museum & Gardens property. There was a little more topography, but the beauty of nature was the same — stands of old growth trees with Deer Creek snaking its way through the woods and a couple of sediment ponds that Grandad built and had stocked with catfish for his grandkids, friends and neighbors' enjoyment. My grandparents' farm included wheat fields, hayfields and cattle in the pasture, which was their livelihood. They also kept a big vegetable garden, which they harvested to preserve and store vegetables in their root cellar for the winter.

There was one blighted site on my grandparents' farm that was close to the road and along the creek. This blighted area was a result of many of our neighbors using it as a dump. It was very convenient for them to back their truck over the edge of the embankment and push their garbage into the creek. Tires, bottles, baling wire, pieces and parts of implements and vehicles, used-up toys, broken water jugs and other things — just use your imagination and you could probably find it. As a child it was the best treasure trove a kid could hope for. We spent hours scavenging through the dump site and playing make-believe games and building all sorts of contraptions. As a teenager the dump became a great place for target practice before going hunting. As an adult I realized, however, what a tragic mess our neighbors had left us and what a mess they made of the beauty surrounding of my grandparents' farm. At some point in time, my family had had enough of our neighbors using that part of our farm for a public dump and used Grandad's bulldozer to bury the trash and restore the creek to its natural beauty. Fortunately, most of the trash was either paper, wood, metal or glass

and, therefore, it was not carried far down the creek and decomposed over time. My brother and I took a little trip to my grandparents' farm over Christmas last year and reminisced over what a great playground we had on that farm — exploring, fishing, camping, hunting and spending hours on Deer Creek just playing in the water.

Fast forward about 35 years and I have been blessed with the opportunity to work on what used to be a very similar farm to my grandparents' farm. Burden is composed of woodlands, agricultural fields, gardens, ponds, wetlands and, unfortunately, a blighted wasteland. This blighted wasteland is a wetland that has unintentionally served as a collection site for the large amounts of trash that floats down Ward Creek, which runs along the south side of our property. I found this wasteland about 10 years ago when I was walking through the woods along the remnants of Ward Creek that were left after the creek was channelized. Unfortunately, the trash that I experienced as a child is quite different today in that it is mainly made of plastic. It floats easily in the stormwater from our neighborhoods, down the streets and

into the storm drains and is deposited in our bayous and wetlands.

This awareness caused me to investigate why parts of our creeks and bayous were channelized over the last 50 years. First, some facts that help put all of this in perspective. The City of Baton Rouge is approximately 80 square miles with a population of over 220,000 people, while the population of the greater Baton Rouge area is approximately 835,000. The hydrology, or movement of water in relation to the land, of East Baton Rouge Parish naturally divides into three main watersheds, which are subdivided into a total of 704 micro-watersheds or subsegments. The watersheds consist of approximately 446 square miles of which there is mixed residential, commercial and industrial land use.

Where does all the water drain during a storm event? The eastern part of the parish drains into the Amite River, and the southern part of the parish drains into Bayou Manchac. The northwest portion of the parish actually drains into the Mississippi River. As Baton Rouge and East Baton Rouge Parish have grown — or what is called “urban sprawl” — flood protection through channelization of these watersheds has reduced, segmented or eliminated natural ecological and beneficial functions of the watershed.

continued on page 4



Trash in a borrow pit at Burden

What Is Wild Apricot?

No, this isn't the latest, greatest Louisiana Super Plant. It's our new membership system that we've been easing into since March. You may have seen some of its features. Has your membership expired recently? That would be Wild Apricot reminding you. Keeping up with the monthly activities with our emails? Again, Wild Apricot. Registering for in-person Reflections? That's right, Wild Apricot. These are all tools that have helped us tremendously, but what's in it for you? Ever changed your email address or moved to a new home? Ever needed your membership card for free entry to an out-of-town garden? How about renewing your membership online? All of these

features are literally at your fingertips.

Give it a test spin. Visit our new membership portal at www.FOBGBurden.com and log in. Your ID is your email address, but if this is your first time to sign on, you will need to establish a password. To do so, just go through the "forgot password" routine. Check out your profile in the upper right corner to correct anything that's wrong, sign up for Reflections or print your membership card. These are only a beginning. If you're really digital, download the Wild Apricot for Members app.

By chance, if you're not in the system or have suggestions or problems, email us at Friends@FOBGBurden.com and we'll jump on it. We'd really appreciate your feedback.

Stormwater *continued from page 3*

In fact, most of the rivers, streams and bayous in East Baton Rouge Parish are listed as impaired and found to be "not supporting" any of its designated recreational uses or fish and wildlife propagation. The Amite River, Comite River and Bayou Manchac and its tributaries are severely impaired, in part due to our stormwater, at levels that require substantial intervention to remediate to fishable and swimmable conditions.

Baton Rouge is tied with Lafayette as one of the top 10 cities in the United States for annual rainfall. On average Baton Rouge receives 62 inches of rainfall each year. All that stormwater must move through the watersheds. Over time, development has resulted in significant degradation of the hydrology within East Baton Rouge Parish. The continued loss of wetlands coupled with the increase of channeled canals and concreted bayous have not only created additional pollution problems for the surrounding areas but have significantly contributed to the flooding of the city along these canals and tributaries. The copious amounts of litter that end up in our watersheds and flow into our bayous, rivers, lakes and finally into the Gulf should have been a warning sign. Instead, Baton Rouge decided to live with the litter and react to flooding caused by stormwater. It is time that we learn how to live with stormwater and react to the litter and other water quality impairments.

To that end I have joined forces with Marie Constantine, Renee Verma

and Kelly Hurtado, and together we have formed the Louisiana Stormwater Coalition. The goal of the coalition is to increase awareness about the benefits of stormwater management and how permanently funding stormwater programs will help solve litter problems and help prevent flooding. Burden is committed to helping raise the awareness of stormwater management by being part of the solution. Working through public-private partnerships our wasteland can become a model, or proof of concept, of what can be done to clean

up and improve water quality through remediation and become a center for wetlands education. My personal goal is that some of the childhood experiences that I had on my grandparents' farm in Oklahoma can be experienced at Burden. Those experiences will, I hope, have a lasting impact on the youth and adults of our community and help them learn how to live with and enjoy water in natural and manmade landscapes that are litter-free and not a threat to our livelihood. This is only the beginning, so stay tuned as we continue this journey together.



East Baton Rouge Stormwater Master Plan

Collecting Figs an Interesting, Rewarding Hobby

by Russell Harris

Believe it or not, figs have become so popular that there are internet auction sites dedicated only to figs, and an illicit black market exists where cuttings of rare fig varieties are smuggled across international borders and sold for hundreds to thousands of dollars each. A simple search of Facebook groups will easily turn up dozens of groups dedicated to collecting and growing figs. Fig enthusiasts from around the world have come together on social media and internet forums to share information, trade, buy and sell fig cuttings. There are estimated to be over 1,000 named fig varieties, and new fig varieties are being introduced regularly by dedicated fig hunters who search rural areas in California and abroad where figs reproduce naturally for wild seedlings bearing unique fruit. In Louisiana we cannot hunt for new fig varieties growing in the wild, but we can enjoy the thrill of growing new varieties, tasting their fruit for the first time and trading them with other collectors.

If you are new to figs, there are a few basic things you should know. Figs are easy to grow and tolerant of a wide range of soils if they have good drainage and are planted in full sun. Growing figs in pots allows you to control their growing environment enough that you can expand your collection to include varieties that are less suited to Louisiana. Not all fig varieties will produce fruit in Louisiana. Some types of figs require pollination from a small wasp that is not found in Louisiana. There are three classifications of figs: common, Smyrna and caprifigs. Common figs do not require pollination to produce fruit, but Smyrna and caprifigs need to be pollinated. Another important factor is the size of the eye or opening at the end of the fruit. Figs with an open eye can be spoiled by rain and high humidity, so varieties with small or closed eye yield the best fruit in Louisiana.

Start your fig collection with varieties that are known to do well in Louisiana and can be found seasonally in local garden centers. LSU developed several fig varieties that are highly

sought after and do well in Louisiana. The varieties developed by LSU are Champagne, Hollier, O'Rourke, LSU Purple, LSU Gold, Scott's Black and Tiger. Some of the LSU varieties are easier to find than others. There are also heirloom varieties that perform well in Louisiana, Celeste, Southeastern Brown Turkey, Smith and Hardy Chicago. Two recent introductions are called Little Miss Figgy and Little Ruby, and both are dwarf varieties well suited for small spaces. Less common varieties take a little work to locate through social media groups or internet forums dedicated to figs.

There are many ways to approach collecting figs, from country of origin to characteristics like flavor and skin color. Some figs have unique histories that many collectors find interesting. The Godfather fig appeared in the film from which it takes its name. The Nixon Peace fig was a gift to President Nixon from China, Belleclair Sport was featured in one of Martha Stewart's cooking shows and there are many other figs with equally interesting stories. The rimada figs, such as Rigato del Salento, Matinencia Rimada, Bordissot Negra Rimada and Oro Bianco, produce beautiful striped fruit. The variety named Jolly Tiger has exquisite, variegated foliage and attractive purple fruit. There are numerous figs that are family heirlooms brought from the Old World by people's ancestors, and they each have their own unique story. Figs also come in a wide range of flavors, including honey, berry, tropical, caramel, tannin, brown sugar and combinations of these flavors. Fig collectors will often describe the taste and texture of a fig as if they are describing a fine wine, boast about their collection and discuss the latest trends in fig culture.

As you can see, there are a lot of aspects to collecting figs. For more specific information on fig care, contact your local LSU AgCenter extension office or contact Russell Harris, East Baton Rouge Parish extension horticulturist, at 9050 Airline Hwy., Suite 120, Baton Rouge, LA 70815. Call Harris at 225-389-3055 or email him at RuHarris@agcenter.lsu.edu.



Rigato del Salento is a honey-flavored fig that is highly sought after by fig collectors.



The Celeste fig is a popular heirloom variety used to develop new varieties by the LSU AgCenter.



Aechmea Roberto Menescal



Neoregelia Dragon

Bromeliads *continued from page 1*

your bromeliad. The second option is planting the bromeliad in its container directly in the landscape bed. Before you consider planting in the ground, however, you will need to make sure that the landscape bed is well drained and does not hold water. A landscape bed that has been amended with pine bark or other types of coarse organic material is best.

To plant directly in the landscape, dig a hole the same size of the container where you want to plant your bromeliad. Next, place the container in the hole just above the soil line and push the soil around the container. Please note that you do not want to put soil on top of the container when planting as it is best to leave it open for good drainage and aeration. If you wish to cover the edges and top of the container you can use the same mulch you have used in your landscape beds — pine straw, wood chips, pine bark or other types of well-drained mulch. I know this sounds a little counterintuitive, but it works because most bromeliads don't grow fast or get very big and will most likely never outgrow their containers. When planting most bromeliads in landscape beds, it is best to plant them in a partly sunny or partly shady area. If planting more than one bromeliad it is best to group similar types together to create more of a clump of plants or plant them as a single specimen plant. Minimal watering is required, usually only once a week if there is no rain. Because most bromeliads are epiphytic and their leaves form a cup at the center of the plant, simply fill the cup as you do not need to water the soil surrounding the plant.

You can easily remove bromeliads out of the soil with their container around October and store it in your garage or inside for the winter with minimal light and water. And the next best part? You can do it again next spring for another year of tropicals in the garden! The final way to display your bromeliads is through mounting! Just like staghorn ferns and orchids, bromeliads can be mounted to a piece of wood to give a fun twist to your patio or outdoor area. To mount a bromeliad, you'll need sphagnum moss, clear fishing line and a piece of wood that won't rot very fast (Cypress or Teak if possible). For detailed instructions on mounting epiphytic plants, visit our YouTube page and watch the Tropical Garden video. You can also view a diverse number of bromeliads in the landscape in the Tropical Garden at Burden just across from the Ione Burden Conference Center.



Billbergia Hallelujah

Cub Scouts



Above: Pack 405 Cub Scouts from Lafayette enjoy a hike in the Burden Woods.

Reunion



A reunion of LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens rosarian, Wanda Ellis, with former student worker Brad Blalock and family.

Volunteer Appreciation Day



Above: The annual volunteer appreciation event in June had a slight twist on the traditional luncheon. Titled "A Reunion of Volunteers on the Grounds," it was more like an old-time family reunion, welcoming volunteers to the Pavilion with desserts and a champagne toast to the official opening of the long-awaited restroom facility. What a grand time it was to visit among friends and to feel a part of the LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens again! **Above right:** LSU AgCenter Vice President Bill Richardson, Friends of LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens Chair Leigh Harris, and Burden Foundation board member Frances Monroe cut the ribbon for the new restroom facility.



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Please check our website for up-to-date information on these events.

July 2021			
July 12	Noon-1 p.m.	Reflections in the Garden	Topic: "The Challenges and Rewards to Doing Conservation Along a Highly Dynamic (Ephemeral) Coast," Seth Blicht, director of coastal and marine conservation, The Nature Conservancy of Louisiana.
July 13	7 p.m.	CABA Monthly Meeting	Capital Area Beekeepers Association membership meeting. Burden Conference Center.
July 17	10 a. m.-Noon	Green Stick Workshop	The summer workshop features Gaye Sandoz, director of the LSU AgCenter Food Innovation Institute, for a fun food-themed morning.
July 21	7 p.m.	BROS Monthly Meeting	Baton Rouge Orchid Society membership meeting. Burden Conference Center.
July 22	6:30 p.m.	HSABR Monthly Meeting	Herb Society of America, Baton Rouge Unit membership. Burden Conference Center.
July 31	7-10 a.m.	Birding at Burden	Guided walk with Luke Laborde, LSU Renewable Natural Resources instructor, through one of the six Birding Loops at Burden Museum and Gardens. Tickets at Eventbrite.com.
August 2021			
August 2	Noon-1 p.m.	Reflections in the Garden	Topic: "A Pollinator's Moon Garden," Tammany Baumgarten, Owner of BaumGardens Landscape and Design, New Orleans.
August 8-13	Varies	Byzantine Icon Workshop	A thoughtful and meditative five-day retreat of traditional painting techniques. Email Diana at dianawells1548@gmail.com to register. Limited spots available.
August 10	7 p.m.	CABA Monthly Meeting	Capital Area Beekeepers Association membership meeting at the Pavilion.
August 18	7 p.m.	BROS Monthly Meeting	Baton Rouge Orchid Society membership meeting. Burden Conference Center.
August 26	6:30 p.m.	HSABR Monthly Meeting	Herb Society of America, Baton Rouge Unit meeting. Burden Conference Center.
August 28	7-10 a.m.	Birding at Burden	Guided walk with Harriett Pooler through one of the six Birding Loops at Burden Museum and Gardens. Tickets available online at Eventbrite.com.
September 2021			
Sept.13	Noon-1 p.m.	Reflections in the Garden	Topic: "History and Flora of the Louisiana Arboretum," Kim Hollier, curator of Louisiana State Arboretum in Chicot State Park.
Sept. 14	7 p.m.	CABA Monthly Meeting	Capital Area Beekeepers Association membership meeting. Burden Conference Center.
Sept. 15	7 p.m.	BROS Monthly Meeting	Baton Rouge Orchid Society membership meeting. Burden Conference Center.
Sept. 23	6:30 p.m.	HSABR Monthly Meeting	Herb Society of America membership meeting. Burden Conference Center.
Sept. 25	7-10 a.m.	Birding at Burden	Guided walk with Ashley Long, LSU Renewable Natural Resources assistant professor, through one of the six Birding Loops at Burden Museum and Gardens. Tickets at www.Eventbrite.com
October 2021			
Oct. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30	10 a.m.-5 p.m.	Corn Maze at Burden	The annual Corn Maze at Burden will be held every Saturday in October. Tickets required. More information on our website.
For more events in October, visit our website at www.LSUAgCenter.com/BotanicGardens			

Visit our website: www.LSUAgCenter.com/BotanicGardens

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