

# THE COMPOST PILE

NEWSLETTER OF THE LOUISIANA SOCIETY FOR HORTICULTURAL RESEARCH  
SPRING 2023

## "ABANDON YOURSELF TO DESIGN" AT THE LSHR ANNUAL MEETING

Tres Fromme, luncheon speaker for the LSHR annual meeting, acknowledges that the word "design" seems to intimidate people.

But Fromme, an internationally known landscape design consultant, says that understanding the design process is the key to achieving memorable and pleasing landscapes.

"There is a tendency to worry about details, fixate on specific plants, and wonder what the final design will be," Fromme says. "I tell people, if we knew the end result in advance, we would not need the process. And it is the process that generates the most compelling ideas and gardens."

Fromme's clients have included the United States Botanical Gardens, the Shanghai, China, Botanic Gardens, and numerous regional and municipal gardens.

However, the ideas he will present at the LSHR annual meeting can be scaled to individual residential garden designs, Fromme says.

"The creative process is essentially the same for developing a residential garden for a private owner or a multi-acre garden for the public. I strive to create the feeling and experience of visiting a private human-scale garden in all my projects, no matter how large or small the scope. I will take the audience through how I approach garden design and share a practical framework anyone should be able to apply to creating new gardens, enhancing existing gardens, and learning from gardens they visit.

"Indeed, part of what I will share is how people may learn from gardens of any size, style, plant palette, and myriad other elements. Versailles may seem massive and not relevant to the average homeowner, but it is! There are many design ideas to abstract from it for use in anyone's garden."

Fromme says he does not ap-

proach landscape design as a problem, "because gardens are not puzzles to be solved, but places of creative expression and vitality."

He says that worrying less and doing more is critical. "Allowing yourself to not know the answer actually encourages creativity."

While his presentation will be richly illustrated with images from a variety of gardens around the world, Fromme will not advocate for specific plants.

"I will not discuss plants individually but as integral components of overall gardens. The trick is to learn how to see past the individual plants to focus on the purposes they serve and the roles they play in the overall garden experience. Forgetting about specific plants early in the design process makes it easier to select and use them."

That said, Fromme notes that he has developed a fondness for

water-wise plants and gardens.

"I have learned through several projects how to create the feeling and ambiance of a traditional rich 'mixed border' plantings using adapted dry species. Collaborating with botanical gardens in Arizona, Texas, and Utah has taught me there is more to low-water-use gardens than the typical 'xeriscape' of desert-looking plants and rocks.

However, Fromme adds that the plant palette is broader in climates like ours, where ample rainfall allows a great variety of landscape options.

"I thoroughly enjoy working with gardens in the Southeast. The possible plants are almost endless and careful design allows for interest in every season. Collaborations with gardens in Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee have allowed me to explore how to use species-rich palettes."

Fromme's presentation will be at the LSHR luncheon, held in the Lafayette Petroleum Club. Details are at right.



photo by Chris Kozarich

Tres Fromme

## MARCH 18 LSHR ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE

**Ira Nelson Horticulture Center  
2206 Johnston St., Lafayette**

**8-10 a.m. Plant release.** Bring your 2022 plant release evaluation form to the plant pickup area. The evaluation form can be downloaded from [lshr.org](http://lshr.org). The hard-copy evaluation is required to receive this year's plant releases. (New members who did not receive last year's plants need not worry about the evaluation form.)

**9 a.m. Plant auction.** The auction should be outdoors near the Ira Nelson Horticulture Center, weather permitting.

**Petroleum Club of Lafayette,  
111 Heymann Blvd.**

**11 a.m.** Bar open.

**Noon. Luncheon buffet.** The luncheon costs \$25 per person. Send payment and reservations with the name of member and guests. Mail to arrive by March 10: LSHR, P.O. Box 51366, Lafayette, LA 70505.

**Guest speaker Tres Fromme,** "Abandon Yourself to Design." General meeting follows.

# ALLEN OWINGS PREVIEW THE LSHR 2023 PLANT AUCTION

Having set new sales records for the past three years in a row, the LSHR plant auction has members eagerly awaiting the 2023 annual meeting.

And Dr. Allen Owings has gathered a bevy of interesting plants from across the South for the auction.

“Flame Thrower Redbuds are coming,” Owings says. “We have the variegated-foilage Tibouchina that has disappeared from the local trade the last couple years.” Owings also is fond of a pink-flowering form of giant Turk’s Cap, which will likely raise bidders’ pie plates.

“We hope all LSHR members will attend the live (and very lively) plant auction on the morning of our annual meeting,” Owings says. “A lot of fun is to be had.”

Owings not only serves as auctioneer with rapid-fire panache, he also travels the region and garners the plants themselves. He seeks out unique and often hard-to-find plants.

“We already have a load of plants at the Ira Nelson Horticulture Center, and four or five more loads are coming,” Owings says.

Donors include Buddy Lee of Transcend Nursery, Loranger, La. Lately, many LSHR auction plants have come from Alabama, and Owings thanks Maarten Van der Giessen for his many



Unique camellia varieties

contributions. Kim’s Nursery in Wilmer, Ala., has also become a reliable source of plants. Dr. David Creech from SFA Gardens is also bringing donated plants for the auction.

Owings welcomes donated plants from LSHR members: “We would greatly appreciate possible plant auction items from any of our members. Feel free to contact me anytime (222) 603-8096; aowings64@gmail.com.”



Giant Pink Turk’s Cap



Variegated Tibouchina

## LUNCHEON MENU

March 18, 2023

PETROLEUM CLUB OF LAFAYETTE

111 Heymann Blvd.

### Salad

Tossed greens with choice of dressing

### Entrées

Sliced brisket with gravy  
Fried fillet of catfish

### Vegetables

Green beans  
Corn macque choux

### Starches

Parsley potatoes  
Rice pilaf

### Desserts

Chocolate cake  
Bread pudding with hard sauce

Tea, coffee, water and dinner rolls with butter; cash bar

Spring 2023 luncheon reservations are due March 10.

The luncheon costs \$25 per person and includes tax and tip. Please send the name of member and guests.

Sorry, the luncheon cannot be reserved the day of meeting.

Mail check to arrive by March 10 to: LSHR, P.O. Box 51366, Lafayette, LA 70505

Any questions, contact LSHR treasurer JoAnn Pugh,

[joannpugh@hotmail.com](mailto:joannpugh@hotmail.com)

cell 337-247-5526

# PLANT RELEASE WILL INCLUDE SOUTHERN Highbush BLUEBERRY

by Dr. Kathryn Fontenot

I am very excited to hear that LSHR members will be receiving and evaluating a Southern highbush blueberry this coming year.

You are probably familiar with rabbiteye blueberries (*Vaccinium virgatum*). Southern highbush plants are different because they were developed from crosses between Northern highbush blueberries (*V. corymbosum*) and a native Southern species, Darrow's evergreen blueberry (*V. darrowi*), giving them the scientific name *Vaccinium corymbosum* interspecific hybrid.

Southern highbush are very much like their rabbiteye cousins with a few exceptions. Most notably, Southern highbush fruit ripens earlier than rabbiteye fruit. Depending on the cultivar you select and the number of chill hours that cultivar requires, Southern highbush blueberries growing in Louisiana can start producing as early as March and ending main production in May. Typically, Southern highbush plants do not require many chill hours. They prefer low pH soils and water in the range of 5.0-6.0 and will grow best in soils that are high in organic matter.



The LSHR 2023 plant release will include a one-gallon Southern highbush blueberry plant. The specimen above is obviously a much larger plant in a much larger container. But highbush varieties thrive in containers, and they yield berries as early as March.

Rabbiteye blueberries have always been noted for their high tolerance of disease and insect pressure. While Southern highbush don't have this same claim to fame, they aren't wimps either.

For the past several years, we have been trialing 10 Southern highbush cultivars at the LSU AgCenter. Apart from a flooded year and phytophthora getting some of our shrubs, this crop has

been relatively easy to take care of. We rarely apply fungicides, and I cannot remember applying an insecticide on this crop.

Southern highbush blueberries are mostly self-fertile but will make higher yields if you have plants of more than one variety. The flowers are complete, meaning they have both male and female parts, but require pollinating insects like bees to help spread the pollen onto the stigma. To produce more berries, plant other flowering crops in your yard to encourage pollinators to stay year-round.

This last difference I'll mention is pretty cool. Some Southern highbush blueberries have such low chill requirements they actually stay evergreen year-round. We have seen in younger plants the foliage turns a deep purple in the Fall to green up in the Winter. In more mature plantings the foliage in some varieties is pretty dense year-round. Now, this isn't the case with every cultivar of Southern highbush blueberries, but we do hope it will be your experience.

My team has been successful for several years and we would like to share a few growing tips with you.

## CONTAINERS VS. IN-GROUND PRODUCTION

Because our planting location is on LSU's campus with high pH soil and high pH water, we chose to plant these shrubs in containers. Depending on which part of the state you reside, this would also be a good idea for you. A 20-gallon container should be large enough for a lifetime of berry production. However, if you want to plant the shrub in the ground, make sure to run a soil test first. Low pH is best.

Even if your soil has a low

*continues on p. 4*



Young Southern highbush plants develop a purple foliage in the Fall.

Blueberries—continued from p. 3

pH, consider adding plenty of organic matter to the planting area. Southern highbush don't like heavy soil or wet feet. Mound up the planting area. In some cases, growers have even trenched into the soil as deep as 14 inches, backfilling with pine bark for a nice loose texture around the roots. If I were just planting a few shrubs...containers are the way to go.

### MEDIA AND FERTILIZATION

Fill the container with very small pine bark fines. Don't use pine bark chips for mulching, the water will move too easily throughout the pot. If you would like to use potting soil, cut it by half or even two-thirds with pine bark. This will balance high pH municipal water.

Make sure to add some slow-release fertilizer to the media, as well as Ironite. Follow the directions on the label for the amount. Most slow-release fertilizers will have a rate per gallon (container size) listed. I like to apply fertilizer twice, in the very early spring, such as early January and again after all harvest has concluded around June.

In between watch the color of

your foliage. If you see signs of nutrient deficiencies, collect foliage from the middle of the plant (not the new foliage and not the oldest foliage) and submit it to the Soil Testing and Plant Analysis Lab at the LSU AgCenter

[[https://www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/our\\_offices/departments/spess/service\\_labs/soil\\_testing\\_lab.](https://www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/our_offices/departments/spess/service_labs/soil_testing_lab/)] They can recommend additional nutrients to apply if you are experiencing deficiencies.



"Bee" sure to place your blueberry where pollinators are abundant.

### IRRIGATION

We try to let the rain irrigate our containers. Rainwater tends to be a little more acidic than our Baton Rouge municipal water. However, we also irrigate daily for about three minutes. Now, our containers are large (45 gallons). But the point of daily irrigation is to balance the mostly, if not entirely, pine bark media. We need to keep the media moist, but not

saturated. Water flows through the porous media more quickly than it would through loam or clay soil. Therefore, daily application with a small amount of water maintains moisture levels. This amount will **not** revive a completely dry media. Let me give you a few more specifics.

The first two weeks after planting, hand-water daily to fully moisten the soil. Make sure you are wetting the entire surface area of the con-

tainer and that the entire container has water in it. Once you see water running out of the bottom of the pot, stop watering.

After the initial two weeks, install a single shrublet nozzle (this nozzle applies water to the container but sprays it below the foliage). Depending on rain and heat, we may run our nozzle for 3 – 5 minutes daily. Three minutes if it is cold and damp, up to

5 minutes if it is extremely hot and sunny. If we have a period when it rains for a week or more, we just shut off the irrigation altogether. Don't shut it off if you experience a single day of rain because you are likely to forget to turn it back on.

### FLOWERING AND HARVEST

Flowers will begin to form on your shrubs in January with fruit production March through May depending on cultivar. Blueberry shrubs are cold hardy. They even like cold "chill hours" to help plants open fruit buds. So, when temperatures drop below freezing, covering isn't necessary unless you see a lot of fully open blooms or small immature fruit on your shrub. At this stage, covering the shrub with frost protection cloth will help keep those flowers alive and make fruit. If not properly covered, tiny fruit will freeze and likely shrivel and fall off the plant.

Once the flowers are open and the petals begin to drop, cover the plant when the temperature is expected to go below freezing.

Harvest the fruit when they are fully blue from blossom end to stem end. Different varieties will mature at different widths, but a mature fruit is firm, not hard.



Don't pick purple fruit; wait 'til they turn deep blue.

Mature fruit easily separates from the plant. Place fruit into shallow containers. The deeper the container, the more bruising will occur, and shelf life will decrease. Do **not** wash the fruit until you are ready to eat it, but place the fruit quickly into refrigeration for the longest shelf life. Do not pick blueberries prematurely; they do not ripen after harvested.

Enjoy these plants! We know you will love growing them.

Kathryn Fontenot, Ph.D.  
 LSU AgCenter  
 School of Plant, Environmental and  
 Soil Sciences  
[kkfontenot@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:kkfontenot@agcenter.lsu.edu)

# THE IRA NELSON HORTICULTURE CENTER



IRA SCHREIBER NELSON  
1911 - 1965

LET ONLY FLOWERS  
SPEAK FOR HIM

LSHR AND THE IRA NELSON HORTICULTURE CENTER ARE VIRTUALLY INSEPARABLE. LSHR'S FIRST CONTRIBUTION TO HORTICULTURAL RESEARCH WAS FUNDING A 1954 PLANT COLLECTING TRIP TO BOLIVIA LED BY PROF. IRA NELSON OF USL (NOW THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT LAFAYETTE).

THE CENTER, WHICH INCLUDES 17,000 SQUARE FEET OF GREENHOUSE SPACE, WAS RENAMED IN 1965 IN DR. NELSON'S HONOR. THE MEMORIAL AND ITS DEDICATORY PLAQUE ARE SHOWN AT LEFT.

APART FROM ITS HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS TO LSHR, THE IRA NELSON HORTICULTURE CENTER IS A BOTANICAL FEAST FOR THE EYES. BEFORE COVID FORCED OUR ANNUAL PLANT AUCTION TO ITS CURRENT OUTDOOR SETTING, LSHR MEMBERS OFTEN TOURED THE INHC GREENHOUSES DURING OUR ANNUAL MEETING DAY.

YOU CAN STILL TOUR THE GREENHOUSES! THE PHOTOS ON THIS AND THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE A SAMPLE OF WHAT YOU'LL FIND.





TAKE TIME TO VISIT THE IRA NELSON HORTICULTURE CENTER DURING THE LSHR ANNUAL MEETING DAY, MARCH 18. AND DON'T FORGET TO SIGN UP FOR THE LUNCHEON, AND TO BRING YOUR 2022 PLANT EVALUATION FORM.

# THE COMPOST PILE

NEWSLETTER OF THE LOUISIANA SOCIETY FOR HORTICULTURAL RESEARCH

E-published triannually by the  
Louisiana Society for  
Horticultural Research  
P.O. Box 51366  
Lafayette, LA 70505

**Editor:** Dr. T. Michael Maher  
tmmaher@gmail.com

LSHR plant people, send me your news!  
I welcome articles and photos about your favorite plants,  
growing techniques and plant lovers.

## LSHR OFFICERS

Rob Barry ..... President  
Albert Durio Sr. .... First Vice-President  
Sarah Schoeffler..... Second Vice-President  
Maxine Ducrest ..... Recording Secretary  
JoAnn Pugh ..... Treasurer

### DIRECTORS AT LARGE

Roxanna Champagne 2023-24  
Dee Piazza 2023-24, 2024-25  
Brenda Gautreaux 2023-24, 2024-25, 2025-26

### PAST PRESIDENTS WITH CURRENT MEMBERSHIP

Mary Courville, Dalton Durio, Dr. Jim Racca, Margo Racca, Albert Durio Sr., Dr. Dennis Wollard

### HONORARY BOARD MEMBERS

Dr. Jean Kreamer ..... Scholarship Chairman  
Dr. Ellis Fletcher ..... Membership Chairman  
Rebecca Moss..... Past Editor - Compost Pile, Scholarship Chairman  
Dr. T. Michael Maher ..... Compost Pile Editor

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope that we all have a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year!!!

I look forward to our Annual Spring Meeting on March 18, which includes the plant release, auction, and luncheon.

Get your tickets for the luncheon, so you can hear guest speaker Tres Fromme discuss the landscape design process.

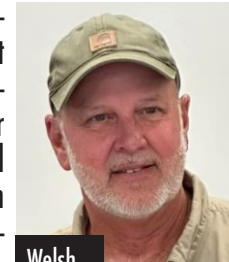
I am excited to associate our plant release of New Hanover, a Southern highbush blueberry, with KiKi Fontenot's research on SHB blueberry varieties. She is growing them in containers on the LSU campus. I like the idea of using containers for garden, yard, and patio.

Please check out the LSHR.org Web site! I would like to welcome Brenda Gautreaux to the Board of Directors as a member at large.

—Rob Barry, LSHR president

## LSHR PEOPLE

The two gentlemen who are most involved with procuring plants for the LSHR annual meeting—Dr. Allen Owings and William Welsh—both



Welsh

were given Lifetime Achievement Awards at a recent meeting of the Louisiana State Horticulture Society.

Welsh, who directs the Ira Nelson Horticulture Center, picks our annual plant releases. He and his capable assistant Kristy Thompson assemble the plants (in some cases, propagating them). Welsh produces a guide that goes with the released plants, explaining growing requirements and plant characteristics. A native of Slidell, Welsh earned a bachelor's degree from Southeastern Louisiana University. An employee



Owings

of UL Lafayette for 34 years, his job title is Research Farm Manager.

Allen Owings was the cover story of this newsletter in the summer 2022 issue, by virtue of his winning the LSHR Medallion Award. He is best known to LSHR members for his zest and humor in conducting our annual plant auction (see page 2). He not only sells the plants with panache; he actually seeks out unusual plants and, in most cases, gets them donated so that sales go toward scholarships and research grants.

Owings retired from the LSU faculty in 2017; he remains active in horticultural consulting and in many plant organizations.

## TREASURER'S REPORT

We are all counting the days 'til March 18, the date of our new plant releases, live auction and luncheon.

At the registration table, you will receive a printed membership card, to be used to pick up plant releases. At a separate table, continuing members who received last year's plants will turn in plant evaluation forms. (New members need not worry about this.)

LSHR volunteers will distribute luncheon name tags at the registration area.

The live plant auction, with wonderful

and hard-to-find plants, will be outside under the elegant trees, weather permitting.

Each year we have had record-breaking sales at the plant auction. The board is hoping to break the record of \$7,300 from 2022! The money is used to award several college scholarships, fund plant research grants and acquire new plants.

We had 89 members to attend the luncheon at Petroleum Club ballroom last year and we are expecting a larger crowd this year! Members are welcome to invite guests to the \$25 luncheon. Please send payment

and names for yourself and all guests, so name tags will be prepared. The luncheon deadline is March 10. Mail has been very slow arriving from out of town, please mail early! The speaker will be Florida landscape architect Tres Fromme with a great presentation. As Tres puts it, his talk will show us how to "transform the mundane into the magical and memorable." You do not want to miss it!

The board is looking forward to seeing all you plant-loving folks on March 18.

—JoAnn Pugh, LSHR treasurer