



# Adam's notes from the garden...

*Sinojackia rehderiana*



I've survived into my second month here, and just when I finally think I've seen everything, many more treasures continue to appear, especially those winter-dormant geophytes that suddenly burst from the ground. During my report last month, the trilliums were up but in bud, now the *T. underwoodii* are faded but the *T. gracile* and *T. foetidissima* are now just starting to open. Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) of northern Florida provenance has formed a nice patch with its starry white flowers and intriguing foliage. Various aroids are up and some have flowered, including a variety of species of *Arum*, *Pinellia*, and *Zantedeschia*.

Scadoxus puniceus

*Scadoxus puniceus* – the orange blood lily – sticks out prominently with three robust shaving-brush-like inflorescences of fiery orange, while in the north dry garden, the more refined flowers of another south African bulb – *Moraea collina* – are creating a show growing amongst Agaves and Yuccas. *Epimedium pubescens* looks its best this time of year with its masses of tiny four-petaled flowers and the crisp shiny new angel-wing foliage providing a nice foil. In the next layer up, many of the many of the Mexican *Mahonia* species are still in full flower, while the Asian species are setting masses of green fruits starting to fade to electric blue or purple. A few late flowering camellias and deciduous magnolias are still showy, but the buckeyes (*Aesculus spp.*) and various members of the Snowbell family Styracaceae (*Styrax*, *Halesia*, *Sinojackia*) are competing for attention.



We just had our first spring “open day” which was quite a success. At least a few folks on every tour noticed the glowing masses of pink in the woodland garden canopy long before we were anywhere close to them. Those who inquired were surprised to find they were in fact the common *Loropetalum* that John has thankfully allowed to grow into trees over 20 feet tall. Though everyone is used to the tightly sheared hedges and meatballs so prevalent in the landscape, it is the true natural tree form that provides the greatest spectacle. Not only do the plants create a hot pink exclamation point in the late winter/early spring landscape, but year around they also can show off their wonderful sinuous trunks with beautifully textured peeling bark crowned with that wonderful dark purple foliage. Other selections have dark green leaves with pale chartreuse fringed flowers for a nice contrast, and make similarly good specimen trees.



Agave lophantha sporting gold pups

The oaks and maples are all flowering profusely and producing their often colorful new flush of leaves ranging from velvety red, matte pink, or golden. Many of the “evergreen” oak species are actually best described as briefly deciduous, and have dropped their old

leaves over the past week or so but are quickly filling in with new flawless foliage which will soon harden off to a lustrous dark green. Our

several *Keteleeria* species and *Cupressus funebris* all suddenly look variegated from afar, but closer examination of these great conifers reveals the bi-color appearance is due to masses of yellow pollen cones at every branch tip.

Loropetalum tree form

In the south perennial garden, the poppies, larkspurs, *Baptisia sp.*, and a number of obscurities are rocketing out of the ground seemingly overnight. More surprises include some attractive mutations on some of our specimens. A broad leaved, yellow flowered *Anthericum sp.* that John collected in Mexico has produced a nicely variegated offset that looks like it has a good chance at being stable. A clump of *Agave lophantha* 'Quadricolor' seems to be pupping off some solid gold plants. When I interviewed for my current job, I found a nicely variegated sport on one of John's *Bauninia galpinii* that we will need to propagate. Across the creek, the real showoff is *Senecio aschenbornianus*. If the mass of yellow on this large shrub hasn't caught your eye from some distance, the pleasant fragrance will surely make you turn your head to see where it is emanating from. Why this isn't grown more is probably on us for not propagating it enough. I think this should be a staple in our nursery, so I've made it our feature plant of the month below to make the proper introduction if you aren't already familiar with it.



---

## Spring Calendar

- 
- **Saturday March 19 Monthly Docent focused training: Cycads and Palms**
- **Saturday March 26 (day before Easter) Peckerwood Garden Open day**
- **Saturday April 9 Peckerwood Garden Open day**
- **Friday April 15 Monthly Docent focused training**
- **Saturday April 23 Peckerwood Garden Open day**
- **Saturday April 30 Houston Garden Conservancy Garden Tours & Peckerwood Garden Plant Sale (located in Houston)**
- **Sunday May 8 (Mother's day) Peckerwood Garden Open day**
- **Saturday May 14 Monthly Docent focused training**
- **Saturday May 21 Friends of Peckerwood Day**

- Friday [June 17](#) Monthly Docent focused training
- Saturday [July 16](#) Monthly Docent focused training
- Friday [August 19](#) Monthly Docent focused training

## Around the nursery



Sabal Uresana

There is no need to wait for an open day or scheduled tour to partake in the many wonderful plants we have to offer for your own landscape. Just give us a call or email and we'll schedule a time when you can visit for purchases. We hope to soon have current inventory listings posted on the website, but for now let us know if there is anything in

particular you are looking for. Our inventory will only be getting better as I relocate more rarities from my former nursery inventory Florida. Some highlights currently available include some Asian evergreen maples (*Acer fabri*, *Acer coriaceifolium*), some exceptionally rare conifers including *Retrophyllum rospigliosii* from the Colombian Andes, the rare Oliver's Plum Yew *Cephalotaxus oliveri*, Variegated and normal green *Thujopsis dolabrata*, *Nageia nagi*, *Pseudolarix amabilis*, and *Taxus chinensis*.

Dyckia

I've brought from Florida some *Trillium maculatum* from the southernmost population in Gainesville, FL (propagated from rescued plants growing at Kanapaha Botanical Garden). Everyone seems to be fascinated by *Ruscus hypoglossum*, which has tiny orchid-like flowers that sprout from the centers of the "leaves", though these are not actually true leaves but instead flattened stems called cladodes. If you are into strange edible plants, why not look into our Japanese Raisin Trees *Hovenia dulcis*. Unlike most edible tree crops where you eat the fruits, you instead consume the sweet fleshy branching peduncles that terminate into inedible hard seed pods – how's that for strange? Most of the Dyckias are in full flower right now, and as always we have a great selection of xeric-growing Agaves, cacti, Dasyliirion, hardy palms including the wonderful *Sabal uresana*, *Sabal*



tamaulipana, and many other items of interest. I've brought five types of seldom-seen species/cultivar of *Aspidistra* spp, including 'Spangled Ribbons' and 'Singapore Sling', both with long narrow erect strap leaves spotted with yellow or white respectively. Many interesting Texas natives too. Come on out and see us!

---

## New Plant Tags in the Garden



*Cupressus funebris* pollen cones

Monthly Docent training classes are open with Cycads and Palms this past Saturday and Quercus April 15th at 4-6 pm. All volunteers are invited to participate.

[Sign up Now](#)

---



New-plant-tags

Have you ever been on a tour at Peckerwood and wondered what all those other intriguing plants are that weren't covered by the docent? Or perhaps you are a docent-in-training and are overwhelmed with the wealth of species to learn? One of the most critical features of a botanical garden is to have the plants clearly identified, and it has long been a goal to get all the plants at Peckerwood labeled for easy reference. After much research and advice from others, we've settled on metal markers from Kinkaid Plant Markers <http://www.kinkaidplantmarkers.com>. These stainless steel tags won't shatter when hit by a weed eater or be gnawed on by squirrels like the plastic engraved tags. They are surprisingly economical, with the label being generated by a Brother label maker, which is weather/UV resistant for many years. The twin-prong stake design prevents rotating in the ground, keeping the label always facing in the right direction. If you have a plant collection in need of attractive labels (who doesn't?) this is by far the best option. They provide discounts for orders from garden clubs too! We've started labeling key plants along the main tour routes and will expand from there. This is a major advancement for Peckerwood!



Please join us as a member of the [Friends of Peckerwood](#). Members receive free admission on Open Days, notices of special events, discounts on plant purchases at the garden and at participating nurseries.

---

[What information or updates do you want to see in our newsletters?](#)  
[Let us know!](#)

## Plant of the month: *Senecio aschenborneanus*



*Senecio aschenborneanus* was a new one for me upon starting here last month. I had grown many other members of this genus from North American natives, South African succulent species, as well as Asian representatives too. I was quite drawn to the color and shape of the blue/gray foliage which somewhat resembled a

shrunk oak leaf hydrangea. The multi-stemmed shrub held this beautiful evergreen foliage in a naturally dense manner. Though it looks very tender, the plant is remarkably hardy in our area, without any blemished leaves

through the several freezes we've had. Normally walking around with my head to the ground looking at every plant I am passing, I was stopped in my tracks yesterday by a sudden sweet fragrance that I couldn't immediately place. Prying my eyes up to survey the surroundings for the source resulted in an instant visual impact of school-bus yellow mounds of Johns grouping of three plants. The buds that had been on the plant since January had all suddenly opened seemingly overnight. During one of my always-enlightening walks in the garden with John, I had remarked on my great appreciation for this plant based on foliage alone, figuring the flowers would be simply an added bonus. He mentioned not collecting it for years as it was "everywhere" in Mexico, and being so abundant it was just seemingly less of a priority while out searching for the few-and-far-between treasures. Fortunately, he did finally collect it and now I can't wait to propagate it for others to enjoy as much as I have. John has grown it in the dappled sunlight of a high overhead tree canopy and has endured zone 8b winters like a champ. It is being grown in a well-drained setting with supplemental irrigation only when necessary and seems pretty ironclad once established. Check in later this year for this plant's availability in our nursery.



## Propagation notes:



*Dendropanax dentiger*

I received some interesting Taiwanese oak acorns (*Quercus*, *Lithocarpus*, *Castanopsis*) from an enthusiast there and they have started germinating vigorously. Some of these are new for trialing in the Texas landscape, but grow in similar conditions to other successful Asian oaks at Peckerwood like *Quercus glauca*. Some are likely new US introductions to horticulture and will be shared with other suitable botanical gardens. There are so many additional great oaks in Taiwan we need to add to John's collection of mostly Mexican oaks. Joining these are some cuttings that have recently rooted from my own collections in Taiwan last

October from a variety of interesting woody plants. Though I couldn't find any acorns, I managed to root two plants

of *Castanopsis fargesii* – one of my favorite Asian oaks with leaves dark green above and a shocking bright rusty red color underneath. The remaining cuttings look like they will root too.

Various Taiwanese oaks germinating

I'm also glad to see cuttings rooting of another favorite – *Lithocarpus konishii* – which has tiny attractive leaves and a naturally dense form – a beautiful tree that was growing in quite dry areas on the leeward sides of the mountains, again side-by-side with longtime Peckerwood



resident *Quercus glauca*. I'm kicking myself for not collecting cuttings of *Lithocarpus kawakamii* – picture and oak with leaves two feet long by six inches wide with a scalloped margin. There's always next time, and I've got my Taiwanese friends on the case for this fall's seed crop, which always seems inconveniently scant according to them. Beyond oaks, also exciting from the Taiwan cuttings are many forms of the highly variable *Dendropanax dentiger* (Aralia family), with leaves shallow or deeply lobed once or twice and therefore resembling tridents or an asymmetrical mitten shape not unlike *Sassafras* foliage. Though in cultivation in a few collections, I found some additional distinctive forms of *Pittosporum illicioides* var. *angustifolium*, which is known for its glossy long skinny foliage. One form I collected had



*Keteleeria pubescens* germinating

very straight and narrow leaves that came to a gradual taper, while the other clone was slightly broad but were distinctly falcate (curved) in a half-moon shape with blunt tips. I had found the latter plant on my first trip to Taiwan in 2010 and regretted all this time not being able to collect it until now. Both

clones rooted at 100% and will definitely have some to offer in our nursery when they get established a little more. Seeds that have germinated from that collection trip include a ton of the great maple *Acer kawakamii*, so look forward to this maple which has done well for me in zone 8b of northern FL and should also do similarly well in southeast TX. Another that I'm excited about is *Engelhardtia roxburghiana* – a member of the walnut family but not at all resembling

Amentotaxus formosanus

walnuts, instead bearing showy yellowish hophornbeam-like hanging clusters of winged seeds which contrast nicely with the rich green foliage. It was impossible to pass a shrub of *Litsea cubeba* along the trail and not grab a mass of foliage to crush and enjoy the strong sweet lemony fragrance, the plant being the source



of cubeb oil. I can't wait for the recently germinated seeds to grow to a size when we can smell that addictive fragrance again – one of those things that should be planted along a garden path to brush up against. Not yet rooted but hopefully soon to follow is *Neolitsea konishii*, with long narrow leaves with distinct venation that emerge bubble gum pink. I got a very complete seed collection of nearly every Taiwanese ginger in the genus *Alpinia* and they have germinated as well, along with a rhizome of a very beautiful purple-flowering *Zingiber* species and another obscure yet beautiful ginger, *Vanoverberghia sasakiana* – the latter only found on tiny Lanyu Island off Taiwan's southeast coast. Also germinated are seeds of the rare toad lily *Tricyrtis ravenii*, which is in cultivation from at least two collections by Tony Avent/Plant Delights Nursery but good to have a new collection for more genetic diversity. Though it keys out best to *T. ravenii*, this one seemed quite dwarfed, so we'll see if the seedlings retain any of these characters. This species, only described in 2007, is named after the esteemed director emeritus of Missouri Botanical Garden, Peter Raven, who we are honored to have serving on Peckerwood's advisory council. Seeds off of John's *Keteleeria pubescens* have started germinating, this being one of the rarer species in cultivation. Having a reputation for being difficult to propagate from seed, the secret is to collect them as fresh as possible, sow them immediately on the surface of some well-drained soil (do not bury them) and sow as many as possible to increase the chances that you will yield a handful. Never buy *Keteleeria* seeds, they are already desiccated by the time you receive them from commercial suppliers. This genus is one of my favorite conifers so I plan to always have available as many species as possible. As soon as I bring them from Florida, we will be offering *Keteleeria davidiana* seedlings in the nursery.

---



Monthly Docent training classes are open with Cycads and Palms this Saturday March 19th at 9 am. All volunteers are invited to participate.

[Sign up Now](#)



From welcoming visitors, to leading tours, to working in the garden or in our office, there are many ways to lend your talents! Let us know how you would like to [get involved](#). Sign up to assist at an event [here](#).

---

## Building and strengthening collaborations



Tom and Evelyn Cox – Cox Arboretum with John Fairey  
It's been a busy month meeting folks in other botanical gardens and nurseries here in Texas, as well as having important people in horticulture visiting Peckerwood. Being new to the Texas gardening scene, it was very convenient that the Texas Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta held their annual meeting last month at Moody Gardens in Galveston, allowing me the opportunity to meet the key people who make these gardens great. We've got a really great assemblage of gardens in the state and collaborative opportunities abound. I got to present on Peckerwood's future goals on a 10 story high Imax screen which was quite interesting.

Moraea collina

Longtime friend and *Ficus* guru David Dewsnap, retired horticulturist from Olbrich Botanical Gardens in Madison, WI toured the garden for a day with John and I. David has perhaps the most extensive collection of obscure *Ficus* species in the country, in Wisconsin of all places and therefore grown indoors. Though we don't have too many *Ficus* species at Peckerwood, we fortunately had one he was interested in seeing due to its taxonomic confusion. John has long grown the rarely available, attractive vining groundcover *Ficus tikoua* in the woodland garden, and it was a good opportunity for David to make some observations, in addition to enjoying the many late winter sights in the garden.



Shortly thereafter, I decided to make a whirlwind 48 hour weekend trip to the Atlanta area to visit with long-time friends Tom and Evelyn Cox at the Cox Arboretum in Canton, GA. Tom has an excellent book co-authored by Dr. John Ruter of the University of Georgia "Landscaping with Conifers and Ginkgo for the Southeast", the culmination of their experiences trialing conifers in the region of the US where it was until recently assumed impossible. Tom specifically included east Texas in his book so this can serve as a valuable reference in selecting suitable conifers for our region. In terms of individual species, Tom's arboretum has likely the most complete collection in the US. Last summer while visiting Tom, I found a variegated branch on his *Ginkgo biloba* 'Saratoga', a distinctive cultivar differing from the usual appearance with long narrow triangular leaves. The other variegated Ginkgo selections tend to be rather unstable, frequently reverting to normal green foliage, but this one looked like it might actually be quite stable. Not wanting to wait another year for the next opportunity to winter-graft this selection, I decided to drive all night Friday after work, arriving 13 hours later at Tom's arboretum Saturday morning. We collected the variegated Ginkgo, which I named 'Saratoga Convict' based on the prison stripes variegation and due to the fact that my half-serious cultivar name suggestion made Tom laugh hysterically. Many other interesting cuttings were collected for future inclusion in Peckerwood's collections, including *Keteleeria cyclolepis* (bringing Peckerwood's *Keteleeria* species collection up to six species) seeds of the subtropical Taiwanese spruce *Picea morrisonicola* and several new *Cryptomeria japonica* selections.



#### Engelhardtia roxburghiana

I originally planned to drive back to Texas on Sunday, but figured while I was in the area I might as well maximize my trip and push the limits of sleep deprivation in order to visit the good folks at Atlanta Botanical Gardens. In addition to sharing lots of cutting material from their extensive conservation collections, Peckerwood

received a collection of about a dozen clones of the highly endangered Taiwanese conifer *Amentotaxus formosanus* as well as a number of clones of another highly localized conifer that almost went extinct a few decades ago – *Juniperus bermudiana* from the island of Bermuda. It is important for an ex-situ conservation collection like Peckerwood to have as much genetic diversity of a particular conserved species as possible, so it was great to get all these clones and serve as a backup germplasm repository.

A few weeks prior, I had a chance to meet Mark Bronstad at Doremus Wholesale Nursery near Warren, TX, but unfortunately missed Ted Doremus. I had been aware of this nursery long before moving to Texas due to the many interesting things they offer. They are the only source of grafted dwarf loblolly pines that can be seen at Peckerwood, originating from dwarf trees grown at the J.C. Raulston Arboretum in Raleigh, NC. I was surprised to learn they are also offering other grafted southeastern pine cultivars, including the compact witch's broom *Pinus virginiana* 'Top Knot' and a beautiful, strongly weeping form of *Pinus echinata*. I've had limited experience grafting Southeastern pines, so since they have worked out the kinks with their methods, I sent them a number of pine cultivars collected at the Cox Arboretum that I think would be good to have grafted onto the adaptable loblolly pine rootstock and introduced into the landscapes of east Texas and beyond. Dwarf pines are commonly used in more northerly areas, and there is no reason why selections can't be similarly made for the south. During one of my return trips to Florida, I also collected cuttings of a variegated *Pinus elliottii* for Doremus Nursery to graft. This selection has spectacular new flushes of needles that emerge solid yellow, transitioning into a banded variegation as it hardens off over the summer.

Last week, I finally got to meet Bob Lovett who operates the Lovett Pinetum near Lufkin. This 43 acre assemblage of conifers from around the world is full of valuable species and serves as a great trial garden to show what can (or can't) prosper in east Texas. I was amazed at what they are doing here. Tom and Evelyn Cox (Cox Arboretum, mentioned above) joined us and we had a great day full of conifer geekery. Tom was lecturing at Stephen F. Austin the following day, so together we headed over there and met up with Dr. David Creech for a tour of the SFA Mast Arboretum and other campus plantings. Though this is my third trip there, I still found many new things in this wonderful collection filled with the unique plants Dr. Creech tirelessly promotes for a diverse landscape. As always Dr. Creech loaded us down with plants of high caliber, including a seedling of *Cornus wilsoniana* – a spectacular Asian dogwood with not only great flowers, but amazing smooth exfoliating bark that resembles that of a lacebark pine, displaying a patchwork of beautiful patterns of chalky white, silver, and olive tones. I have one clone that Far Reaches Farm is selling from Washington Park Arboretum but it was great that David was able to offer new material with the potential for better bark qualities. As I continue to mention, genetic diversity in cultivation is critical. Tom gave a great talk dispelling the myths of the many amazing conifers that will succeed in the hot humid south, and Mark Bronstad even showed up which allowed for some updates on the grafting of the various interesting pine cultivars I had sent him earlier. Tom and Evelyn then followed me to Peckerwood where John and I spent a very enjoyable day giving them the grand tour before working their way back to GA.



---

## Volunteers Making an Impact!

As I've been settling in to the challenges of my new position, it has been so encouraging to see the enthusiasm displayed by many volunteers, including those new and those who have been involved with the garden for many years. Craig Jackson has been a tremendous help, doing the majority of the work putting together the extensive docent training packet, along with helping in the office, nursery and garden while also being a docent. Craig, Brenda Wilson and Ruth McDonald have shared my great interest in getting a handle on the entrance area and beautifying the plantings there and around the office buildings – an area that's embarrassingly gotten out of hand yet the first thing

visitors see upon arrival. Brenda and Ruth have already spent considerable time weeding and pruning around the office. Nancy Royal has been a tremendous help in the office every Tuesday helping Bethany and along with Craig, working on the new plant tags. We have many ambitious plans for reclaiming the nursery property and its many valuable plantings, along with expanding upon our nursery and propagation areas, and we will definitely need help. A lot of the major developments beyond the entrance area will be pending the finalization of Peckerwood's master plan, but in the meantime we may need help clearing encroaching vegetation away from significant trees on the nursery property. If you are interested in some work in the garden that will help advance Peckerwood's development plans, please let Adam know.