

# The Clod-Hopper



Volume 2, digital edition 8

Gardeners of Wake County, Inc. — Raleigh, NC

August 2018

## Dunes on the Big Lake

by Paul Hoffman, President

Judy, Joe, and I just returned from a week camping in P.J. Hoffmaster state park on the shore of Lake Michigan with a group of about 90 brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews, along with their husbands and wives and children. I grew up in West Michigan as the oldest of eleven. The camping week gives us chance to reconnect while enjoying many of the activities we experienced as younger folks.



For us as children, going to the beach meant driving thirty miles west to the “big lake” with a picnic basket and blankets to spread over the white sand. We went hoping there would be a “red flag” up at the park which would mean big waves to

splash in so that you wouldn’t notice the water was 65 degrees warm.

I didn’t realize it at the time but the beaches in West Michigan are special. The prevailing wind is from the west. This results in a rocky shoreline 90 miles across the lake in Wisconsin, but in Michigan the winds have



built up a line of dunes that cover over 300,000 acres on the near-400-mile-long north/south lake shore. The dunes appear to be about 10,000 years old and in places rise up to 100 feet in height. Though, over time, forest has grown up on the dunes, in places there will be “blow outs” where the sand is uncovered, making for a great hill to climb to look over the lake and an even better hill to run down.

## Club Meetings

Monthly meetings are at 7:30 PM at the JC Raulston Arboretum every 3rd Tuesday. Refreshments and socializing begin at 7:00.

On Tuesday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, Gardeners of Wake County members and visitors will hear Mark Weathington, the JC Raulston Arboretum Director, discuss his recently published book, *Gardening in the South: The Complete Homeowners Guide*. The book emphasizes how plant choice and garden style are firmly connected to wherever growers happen to live. Weathington says he tried to offer an update to older references. “I focus on making gardening less labor intensive, since modern growers tend to have less time to devote to gardening.” Mark’s GWC presentation will profile the region’s best perennials, annuals, trees, shrubs, and bulbs. No North Carolina gardener should miss this one!

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## Club Officers and Committees

### Board members

President: Paul Hoffman

Vice President: Don Strickland

Secretary: Jim Moore

Treasurer: Mac Williamson

Immediate Past President: Sherrill Johnson

At-large board members: Barbara Brown, Ginny Parker, Ed Ponek, Gail Posey

### Committee members

Activities Chairs: Will Farmer (seed swap), Renee Engates (refreshments), Mark Boone (picnic), Ginny Parker (awards banquet)

Audit: Rose Cotton, Charles Gilliam, Kathy Moore

Azalea Sale: Charlie Leverett

Beautification Awards: Josephine Tayao

Club Awards: Jim Moore

Endowment Investment: Charles Gilliam

Friendship: Reed and Chris Elliott

Historical: Donna Farmer,

Membership: Barbara Brown

Newsletter Editors: Laine Thomas, Reed Elliott

Nominating: TBA

Programs: Don Strickland

Projects: Sharon LaRusch

Publicity: Charles Gilliam

Refreshments: Renee Engates

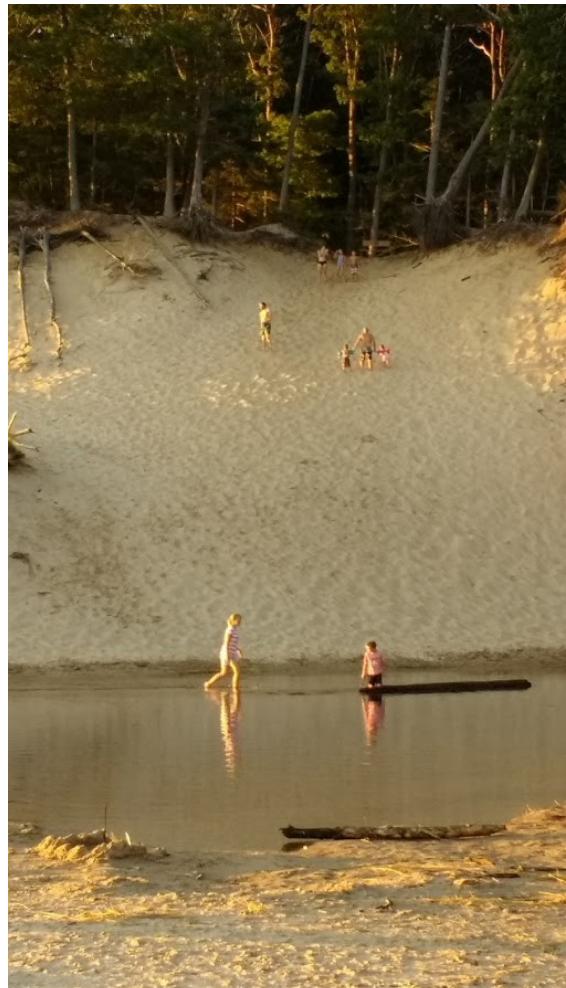
Scholarship: Joanne Boone

Telephone: Johnny Johnson

Webmaster: Reed Elliott

### Dunes on the Big Lake (continued from page 1)

I learned from the state park nature center that a plant plays a great part in building and maintaining these dunes. *Ammophila brevigulata* (ammophila is Greek for “sand lover”), or marram grass, is a beach grass about 20 inches tall that grows in tight clumps. It has long rhizomes which enable it capture and hold sand that blows up on the beach. As the sand accumulates, the rhizomes grow longer and the leaves will stay on top allowing the dune to build up.



## Contact Us

For additional information email our Club at  
[gardener@gardenersofwakecounty.org](mailto:gardener@gardenersofwakecounty.org)

Contact Paul Hoffman, President, by phone at home: 919-781-0785 or by cell: 919-559-5495

Our Club webpage is available at <https://gardenersofwakecounty.weebly.com/>

Take a look at the photos to get an idea of what the Michigan beaches are like. Maybe you'll want to visit there some day. I understand the marram grass, like me, has migrated south to North Carolina. You might see it doing its work on some of our North Carolina beaches as well.

# August's Speaker, Mark Weathington, Explains "How to Garden in the South"



On Tuesday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, Gardeners of Wake County members and visitors have an opportunity to hear the guest speaker with the shortest-ever commute to Raleigh's JC Raulston Arboretum: Mark Weathington, who just happens to be the Arboretum Director. Weathington's presentation will center on his recently published book, "*Gardening in the South: The Complete Homeowners Guide*," that should be of keen interest to all North Carolina gardeners. The book emphasizes how plant choice and garden style are firmly connected to wherever

growers happen to live. "To grow a flourishing garden," says Weathington, "all amateur horticulturists must know the specifics of their region's climate, soil, and geography." *Gardening in the South* addresses gardeners of all levels, featuring information on soil preparation, maintenance, and basic design principles, in addition to the site and plant selection.

When we asked Mark what inspired him to tackle such an ambitious undertaking, he responded, "I realized there hadn't been a general publication on Southern gardening in decades...so it seemed like a worthwhile project." Weathington says he tried to offer an update to older references. "I believe my book has better photos than many others," he says, "plus I focus on making gardening less labor intensive, since modern growers tend to have less time to devote to gardening." Mark's book obviously fills a need in Dixie because, within one year, Timber Press had to print a second run to meet the demand, and *Gardening in the South* gets a five star rating on Amazon. "Feedback has been very positive," remarks Weathington. "What's more, I don't think any of the reviews are from my mom."

Mark's GWC presentation will profile the region's best perennials, annuals, trees, shrubs, and bulbs. His color photographs will show prime examples of southern garden style in Virginia, Kentucky, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and--of course--North Carolina.

Before becoming Director at JC Raulston, Mark's impressive portfolio includes serving stints as Director of Horticulture for the Norfolk Botanical Garden, horticulturist for the Atlanta Botanic Garden, Horticulture Supervisor at the Virginia Marine Science Museum, sales associate for Laurel Creek Nursery, and faculty member at the Tidewater Community College. He travels extensively searching for new plants to enhance the American landscape and his explorations have taken him to China, Taiwan, Japan, Ecuador, Europe, Mexico, New Zealand, and throughout the US.

An accomplished writer and speaker on many horticultural topics, he has recently revised and updated Raulston's *Propagation Guide for Woody Plants*. His work has been published in *Horticulture*, *Carolina Gardener*, *American Nurseryman* and *VA Gardener* magazines as well as the *Mid-Atlantic Gardener's Book of Lists*. Mark writes a column for Raleigh's *News & Observer* newspaper and is currently working on several other projects.

Mark is known for his desire to connect people with plants and is certain to display that passion in his August 21<sup>st</sup> GWC presentation.

# July at the Longview Garden Walk Project

by Lynn Swanson



A hardy group of gardeners headed to The Garden Walk at Longview for the July 21 workday. There was a nice blend of old hands and new faces, and everyone worked together beautifully cutting, digging, pulling massive roots, raking, loading, and wheelbarrowing. We were startled to see the extent to which the “jungle” we’d cleared in previous months had encroached again due to vigorous summer growth and lots of moisture. It’s easy to see how years of neglect

buried this beautiful walkway! Never fear, though! The GWC is on the job. In fact, the job started earlier than usual this month. Because of the anticipated heat, our “workday” began at 8:30 with plans to work for two hours. Though humidity was in full swing, the day was overcast so at least we didn’t have blistering sun to contend with.

We were “in the pink” on this workday. One group laboring to clear undergrowth revealed some long-buried but courageously blooming mimosas. And as we looked up, we were rewarded with the sight



of an old crape myrtle, now freed from vines and tangles, in full bloom of bright pink. Some wildflowers and a jack-in-the-pulpit were spotted. Invasive or special? We’ll keep an eye on them and time will tell!

Measurement from the first step at the top of the garden walk to the extent of cleared bricks equals 200 feet! Clearing on both sides of the path deepens. Progress continues! All that’s missing is you! If you haven’t come out for a workday yet, join us in August! Our next fun-and-beauty-filled workday will be on Saturday, August 25<sup>th</sup>.



# The Blooming of Peter Grande

by Laine Thomas, Editor

On July 7<sup>th</sup>, visitors to Plant Delights in Garner NC witnessed the blooming of *amorphophallus titanum*, Peter Grande. Charles Gilliam of GWC and County Register of Deeds was on hand to observe and take official measurements of Peter Grande. The first cultivated bloom to occur in the U.S. was in 1937. Recently, this event occurs a few times per year around the world. The titan arum, for short, grows naturally in the rainforests of Sumatra, and the bloom is approximately 3 meters tall. The titan arum requires approximately 8 years of growth before blooming and between blooms, while some plants bloom more often. According to Wikipedia “The spathe\* generally begins to open between mid-afternoon and late evening and remains open all night. At this time, the female flowers are receptive to pollination. Although most spathes begin to wilt within twelve hours, some have been known to remain open for 24-48 hours. As the spathe wilts, the female flowers lose receptivity to pollination.” \*A spathe is a large sheath enclosing the flower cluster.



The titan arum smells bad. It is famous for smelling like rotting meat. The chemicals released are those associated with limburger cheese, rotting fish, sweaty socks, chloraseptic and feces. Interestingly, these are also the flavors in a new party game based on Jelly Beans that look yummy but taste awful. We played this during our recent family trip to Roan Mountain. Reed Elliott, our esteemed editor, ate the rotten fish gummy bean with a straight face, and quietly ended the game. It appears that Jelly Beans have released an *amorphophallus titanum* themed box. The story of *amorphophallus titanum* opening was detailed by Tony Avent on his blog. The entire thing is worth a read <http://blog.plantdelights.com/peter-grande-a-living-sculpture/>. From here on out I have selected some excerpts from the blog and also the comments. Online interactions around this event were equally fascinating.



## The Blooming of Peter Grande

(continued from page 5).

By 5 pm the female parts were receptive, so it was time for the artificial insemination to begin. To reach the female parts, we cut a window in the base of the spathe. Inside are hundreds of female ovaries/stigmas, covered in a sticky syrup to hold the pollen. Next, we made a withdrawal from our sperm bank and recovered the pollen from our own *Amorphophallus albus*, that flowered a few weeks earlier. Our goal is to create a winter hardy, offsetting version of *Amorphophallus titanum* that we could grow in the ground here. Small paintbrushes are used to apply the pollen to all of the stigmas. Peter Grande, continues to expand, hitting the 76" tall mark today. This ties it for the 30th tallest flower (inflorescence) recorded in US history. Here are a few images from the blessed event, starting when Peter began to open



### Questions and answers:

Q: Thank you so much for the live cams. I've watched and marveled at the plant – and at your lack of fear in letting people get so close! Like you, I hope a young person's interest will be sparked by seeing a wonder like Peter Grande. I loved seeing the 'windows' and reading the description of why they were made. I couldn't figure out what people were seeing at the base of the plant. Right now, I wish I were that 'young person'!!

A: We learn through our five senses including touch. Do not touch signs deprive us of one of the ways in which we learn.



Q: Is it just a coincidence that the New York Botanical Garden also has one that is opening now, or is it a seasonal thing?

A: Great question! ... June is the peak month for flowering, followed by July, May, and then August.

Q: Is that it for Peter then? Will he live on only in possible progeny or will he rise again?

A: If Peter forms seed, he will probably die as a result of childbirth. If not, he should flower again in 3-8 years.

# My Corner of the Garden

by Reed Elliott, Editor

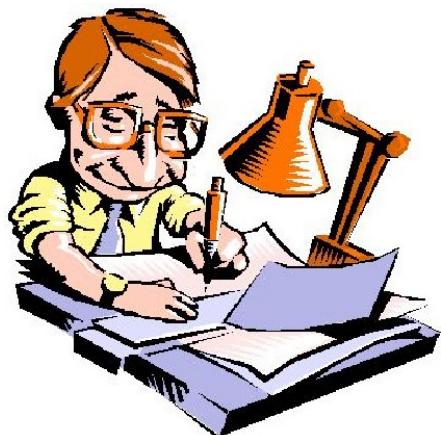
In addition to gardening, one of my pleasures is reading. Awhile back I ran across a book entitled, "In Search of the World's Worst Writers." One of the sidesplittingly hilarious examples was an epic poem addressing sugar cane production in the West Indies in the 1700s. The editor was especially taken by a series of verses that began with the line, "And now, O muse, let us sing of rats."



In that vein, I'd like to address a topic that my wife feels comes close—okra. And now, O muse, let us sing of okra! This much maligned vegetable is long a staple in Southern gardens—and with good reason. This year I prevailed on my wife to let me plant some okra. If you've never planted okra, I've got to go on record saying a few things in its favor (or, perhaps, defense)—it grows like mad; it produces fruit in bushels, and it has really pretty flowers. Is it slimy? Well, yes. But we're here to praise okra, not to bury it!

About that slime. *Medical News Today* reports, "*The mucilage of okra binds cholesterol and bile acid. It collects toxins from the liver and carries them out of the body.*" Who'd a thunk it?!

And there's more. *Medical News* goes on to state that nutrients in okra may make it useful for treating a variety of serious health problems. They report encouraging preliminary results of research using components of okra to treat cancer and diabetes and also note that okra's high fiber content "*can reduce harmful cholesterol levels in the blood (and) lower the risk of heart disease, stroke, obesity, and diabetes. High fiber diets help prevent constipation, maintain a healthy digestive system and reduce the chance of developing colorectal cancer. Fiber in the diet also decreases appetite, so eating (lots of—editor's note) okra may contribute to weight loss.*" - if only because swallowing the slimy stuff would cause most people to lose their appetite.



From personal experience I also can confirm that okra makes great quick pickles. My take is that at least part of the secret is to select small (about 3-inch-long), young okra and pickle them whole. If you slice the okra before pickling, its notorious mucilage produces a slimy, gooey pickle that's not going to appeal to most people—even confirmed pickle eaters, even okra eaters, have to draw the line somewhere.



Will Chris let me plant okra again next year? The jury's still out on that one but in the meantime, "Now, O muse, let us sing of okra!"

## New Members

The Gardeners of Wake County welcomes anyone and everyone who loves gardens and gardening. This month we're happy to welcome Rhonda Sherman of Raleigh. Be sure to say, "Hi and welcome" if you see her at this month's meeting.