



Friends of HILLTOP ARBORETUM

EXPLORE.

LEARN.

ENJOY.



Spring 2025 Newsletter



News and Events



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A Message from the President

The green buds and colorful blossoms erupting on the grounds of Hilltop right now alert us that spring has arrived, cheering and energizing even the weariest of us.

In her recent book, *Good Nature: Why Seeing, Smelling, Hearing and Touching Plant is Good for Our Health*, author Kathy Willis uses scientific research to prove how nature helps reduce stress and makes for a happier, healthier environment.

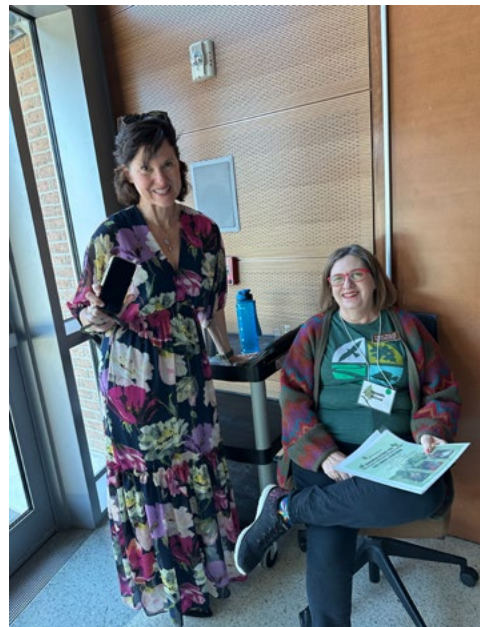
Our founder, Emory Smith, knew this instinctively when he purchased his plot of land on Highland Road for his personal sanctuary and later entrusting it to the Friends of Hilltop Arboretum for future stewardship.

“I believe in the natural world about me and its fitness as a home for the human family. I know it is a privilege to help my neighbor find calmness of mind and uplift of spirit by contributing to an environment that speaks of peace and joy,” he said.

As you can see from the many volunteers pictured in this newsletter issue, The Friends of Hilltop is more committed than ever to Hilltop’s care by promoting educational programs and events while enhancing the site plantings and facilities to help us and our neighbors find calmness of mind and spirit. It’s the power of community support, combined with the power of flora, that will continue to heal and sustain us. We invite you and yours to join us anyway you can!

“May the small part of nature under my control be the better because of the way in which I have used it.” – Emory Smith

Colette Dean, Board President



Colette Dean (L) and Connie McLeod (R) enjoy the Symposium.



A pollinator at work.



A banana spider rests on its web.



Into the eyes of a dragonfly.

A Message from the Director

Dear Arboretum Friends,

As we welcome the vibrant season of spring, it’s a wonderful time to reflect on the growth and dedication that make Hilltop Arboretum such a special place. This time of year reminds me of the resilience and beauty found in nature, and it also brings to light the incredible contributions of our volunteers and small but mighty staff who work tirelessly to ensure that the Arboretum remains a haven of beauty, education, and inspiration.

I want to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to our board members, volunteers, and staff. Your dedication, passion, and commitment to preserving and enhancing this beautiful space do not go unnoticed. From assisting with daily operations to leading educational programs and providing hands-on care to our plant collections, you make an impact every single day. We truly couldn’t do this work without you, and your enthusiasm is what keeps Hilltop flourishing year after year.

Looking ahead, I’m excited to share a season of enriching programs and events that will bring us together. We’ve worked hard to design experiences that celebrate the wonders of nature, whether it’s through plant sales, garden tours, educational programs, or outdoor activities for the youth. We are eager to welcome you to these upcoming events, and we hope that you will find as much joy in these programs as we do in creating them.

Thank you again for being a part of our journey, and for all the ways you help Hilltop Arboretum grow. I look forward to a season of connection, discovery, and, of course, the many blooms of spring.

Tara Titone, Director



Basketflower by Linda Medine.



Goldenrod by Linda Medine.



Dandelion by Linda Medine.



Coreopsis by Linda Medine.

In Memory of Julia Hawkins



Julia Hawkins sitting left of Hilltop Founder, Emory Smith.



Julia Hawkins celebrates her 103rd birthday at Hilltop.

Julia Hawkins and her husband, Murray “Buddy,” helped organize The Friends of Hilltop Arboretum shortly after Hilltop Arboretum was dedicated to Louisiana State University in 1981. Murray served as the first board president.

Throughout the years, Julia, Buddy, and Emory Smith and his wife, Annette, were great friends and spent many hours collecting and cultivating native plants around the state and planting them at the arboretum. Julia’s front yard in University Acres still has the beech tree, now mature, along with many other plants that were given to her by Emory to populate her yard.

Julia, along with June Gonce, another charter member of the Friends group, chaired Hilltop’s first plant sale – made up of “largely monkey grass and gum tree seedlings,” according to Gonce. “We had one person who donated a bunch of aloe vera that was popular, and I think we raised \$951.00, which was great back then.” Gonce said Julia kept a card file of people who contributed plants and their contact information, which proved to be very useful in connecting people with plants they wanted.

Buddy and Julia would offer their home for Hilltop garden tours, where visitors would see their collection of driftwood and garden gnomes nestled among their woodland garden. Bob Dillemoth, another early Friends member, said the Hawkins would sell their collection of driftwood affixed with bromeliads, orchids, and ferns - a fixture the first 10 years of plant sales which would always sell out.

Julia had several birthday celebrations at Hilltop. At one birthday celebration, bald cypress trees were planted in honor of her late husband. One of her last celebrations at Hilltop, honoring her 103rd birthday, 103 Taiwan cherry tree saplings were sold in under one hour along with many copies of her self-published memoir, *It’s Been Wondrous: The Memoirs of Julia Welles Hawkins*. She received a framed citation from the mayor in recognition of the role she played in the beautification of Highland Road. The three-hour party was a grand success and Julia said, “Nothing could have topped it. It was the party to end all parties!” The event culminated the establishment of the Julia Hawkins Beautification Fund for the Friends of Hilltop Arboretum.

In her book, *Magic Moments*, available at Hilltop, Julia encouraged each of us to pay attention to those daily magic moments and find the joy in living every day.

Memorial donations may be made to Hilltop [online](#) or by calling 225-767-6916.

Noteworthy News from Hilltop



Hilltop held its annual workshop with Dr. Charles Allen in the Cajun prairie-inspired meadow. Dr. Allen observed five of the six grasses that comprise the backbone of a prairie: big bluestem, little bluestem, switchgrass, Indian grass, and eastern gamma grass. Some forbs observed were rattlesnake master, ashy sunflower, liatris, golden aster, false indigo, and black-eyed Susan. Hilltop will continue to work to diversify the meadow by removing invasives and planting compass plant, mamou, sweet coneflower, milkweed, and sensitive briar. Dr. Allen confirmed an “established meadow” and suggested skipping seeding this year to see what will grow.



Christopher Cooper of Baton Rouge Green led a tree pruning and planting demonstration at Hilltop’s “Celebration of the Oak” in December. Participants learned how to identify a healthy potted tree and methods for pruning roots and branches to ensure healthy growth. As part of the demonstration, Chris planted a small Live Oak in Hilltop’s Cathedral. Live oaks are considered a “keystone species,” meaning they are crucial to the health and stability of their ecosystems, supporting a wide variety of life, including mammals, birds, insects, and plants.



LSU Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture instructor, Bryce Donner, held a student showcase at Hilltop. The students’ infographics elucidate on Louisiana’s natural communities. Communities featured were the Cypress-Tupelo Swamp, Bottomland Hardwood Forests, Spruce Pine Forests, and Prairie Terrace Loess Forest.



Hilltop offered a Sip ‘n’ Seed workshop with Peggy Coates. Peggy demonstrated methods for starting native seeds. She explained the difference between scarification and stratification and how both aid in germination. Stay tuned for more “Podge Perks”- small ways that Hilltop can give back to its members.



Scott Courtwright of Trinity Tree Consultants deployed his expertise and technology to carefully remove Hilltop’s beloved silver bell tree. Hilltop will continue to honor the legacy of the tree, planted by Emory Smith and once the largest Silver Bell in the state, by allowing its basal shoots to grow into a new tree.

Spring Fling Plant Sale

Members Only Sale - Wednesday, April 2, 9am – 4pm

Public Sale - Saturday, April 5, 9am – 4pm & Sunday, April 6, 12pm – 4pm

Celebrating decades of masterfully connecting people and plants in the unique, natural space that is the LSU Hilltop Arboretum, this year's Spring Fling will offer an expanded selection of native plants for sale along with native plant resources and education. Over 300 species of native and traditional trees, shrubs, perennials, vines, ferns, camellias, and grasses, all sourced from trusted nurseries in the south, will be available for purchase. Hilltop "plant experts" will be on hand to assist with your plant selections and offer landscaping advice.



Shoppers enjoying Spring Fling in 2024.

Browse our unique collection of gently used wares and find a bargain at the "Yarden" sale. Visit the Children's Tent for educational crafts for the kids and visit the lively Vendor's Village under the pavilion.

This year's vendors include: All Jammed Up, Caked Juice Co., Evelyn Davis Farms, Freeman's Sweet Treats, Grammy's Kettle Corn, Louisiana Wild Society, Greenhand Nursery, Miss Just Growing Here, Mycocentrics, Next Chapter Coffee Company, Succulent Boutique by Ing, and Yaya's Blooms & Dough. New this year will be "Hilltop Hospitality", featuring a variety of concessions to enjoy while you're shopping the sale!

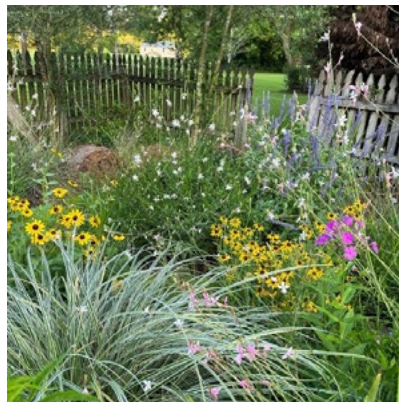
Become a Friends of Hilltop member by Thursday, March 27, to receive access to the members sale and discounts on plants. Members will receive a link to the plant availability list one week prior to the sale.

Spring Fling Pre-Sale Teaser

Featuring: Heather Frazier Blanchard

Sunday, March 30, 2 – 3:30pm

A passionate advocate for native habitat gardening, Heather will share her philosophy and approach to native gardening, introduce us to her favorite plants, and share ways to collect some of those harder to find plants.



Heather Blanchard at home in her "Gold Certified" Louisiana native habitat.



Founder of "Heather's Habitat," a Facebook page that shares information and photographs on growing and nurturing native plants in her own yard in Plaquemine, Blanchard encourages others to post and share their experiences. Blanchard will share her tips for native plantings for newbies and seasoned gardeners and provide snippets of information gleaned from 25 years of experience and research.

Following the program, enter a ticket to win a featured plant, then join us for a post-program tour of the Hodge Podge Nursery to view the plants available at the sale.

Registration \$20 for Friends of Hilltop members and Students; \$25 for the public.

Register Here



Spring Fling Volunteers

We need your help! Spring Fling volunteers are needed before, during, and after the sale. Please consider volunteering. Sign up using the QR code.

Our plant sales are primarily led by volunteers. Many of the efforts start months in advance of the sale. A special thank you to those who lend their time and expertise to Hilltop year-round to see the sales to fruition!

Plant Watering

March 25 - April 1

Water all plants from date of delivery until plant sale. You can choose your own dates and times!



Sign Up Here to Water Plants

Sale Setup

April 1

Place tents, banners, signs around site. Set up tables and chairs and assist staff as needed.



Sign Up Here to Assist with Setup

Members and Public Sale

April 2, 4 & 5

Volunteer as a cashier, wagon coordinator, floater, traffic control, and more. Free snacks and drinks provided for all volunteers!



Sign Up Here to Work the Sales

Youth Volunteers

April 2, 4 & 5

Need service hours? Be a wagon helper and work in the children's tent during the sale.



Sign Up Here to be a Youth Volunteer

DONATE TO HILLTOP

Drop off your gently-used household and garden items to Hilltop by Monday, March 31, for the Spring Fling Yarden Sale.

More garden tools are needed. Decorative serving items, dishes and bowls are in demand!

Visit Yarden for a bargain while at the sale!

All Yarden proceeds directly benefit Hilltop.



Spring Fling Yarden shoppers in the Hilltop Arboretum library.

Programs and Events

Discover Nature Lecture Series

Through a partnership with the Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater Baton Rouge (LMNGBR), the Friends of Hilltop offers monthly programs featuring local and national experts who are in touch with nature and eager to share their experiences. Do you have ideas for a future speaker? Let us know!

Registration is \$10 for students, Hilltop members, and LMNGBR members; \$15 for non-members.



Register Here

- Tuesday, March 25: "Medicinal Mycology" with Jordan Gros
- Tuesday, April 22 (Earth Day): "Garden Allies" with Frank Rinkevich
- Tuesday, May 27: "LA Snake Boyz" with Kevin and Rachel Hood
- Tuesday, June 24: "Native Cut Flowers" with Jen Blanchard
- Tuesday, July 29: "Flower Pressing" with Connie McLeod
- Tuesday, August 26: "Bubbly and Butterflies" with Janine Kharey
- Tuesday, September 23: "Hummingbirds" with Dennis Demcheck
- Tuesday, October 28: "Bats and Brews" with Kevin Whalen
- Tuesday, November 11: "Wintering Natives" with LA Wild Society



Guests enjoy a talk on "Monarchs and Migration".

Friends of Hilltop Presents:

Spring Garden Tour 2025

"Celebrate the Garden District: A Designer Porch & Garden Stroll"

Sunday, May 18, 1 – 4 p.m.

Join the friends of Hilltop for an afternoon walk through the Garden District neighborhood, where you'll see mature live oak trees lining the boulevards and feel as if the whole area is one large garden tour.



One of the oldest neighborhoods in Baton Rouge, the Garden District is in the Mid-City area between Government Street and Park Boulevard and made up of a conglomerate of three historic districts defined by the Louisiana National Register of Historic Places: Roseland Terrace, Drehr Place, and Kleinert Terrace.

The tour will feature six beautiful, quaint gardens and porches. As part of the tour, visit the pollinator gardens dotted along Camellia Avenue and learn more on how you can beautify your street corners. The homes on tour vary between grand and upscale or quaint and modest, each connected by sidewalks and alleys, and the owners continue to uphold and maintain the neighborhood's beauty and appeal through the upkeep of their own garden spaces.

Hilltop is still looking for a few volunteers. Please email taratitone@lsu.edu if you are interested.



Register Here

Volunteer Contributions to Hilltop



Linda Medine contributes her talents by photographing Hilltop throughout the seasons. A neighbor to Hilltop, Linda was able to capture visitors enjoying a snowed-in Hilltop this January.



Scouts BSA Troop 7 at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge contributed their time, talent, and materials to design and construct a much-needed soil bin and shade structure in the Hilltop nursery.



A planning lunch was held with some Hodge Podge volunteers to kick off the new year. Hilltop could not operate without this critical group of talent, dedication, and zest!



(L to R): Jenneke Visser, Virginia Gardner, Marcy Hardy, Cathy Smilie, Will Reinhardt, Clay Smilie, and Garrett Nielsen pose upon the substantial completion of the Hodge Podge fence.



Hilltop is grateful for Chris and Sharon Werner for their countless contributions. Chris served as Friends of Hilltop Board President for 13 years and continues to support and guide the future of Hilltop.



(L to R): Claudia Brian, Linda Babin, and Al Delaney have been reliable and trusted cashiers at the Symposium, plant sales, and other events.



(L to R): Jenneke Visser, Debbie Corbo, Garrett Nielsen, and Virginia Gardner assemble table arrangements for the Symposium dinner.



Apiarist Kevin Langley came to the rescue when arborists felling a tree discovered a hive. Kevin educated the crew on relocating the bees and harvesting honey.

Volunteer Spotlight: Garrett Nielsen

Garrett joined Hilltop as a corporate volunteer in 2023 and has since shown up on a regular basis to help with anything needed, indoors and out. Garrett has a delightful sense of humor, a can-do attitude, and a detailed, problem-solving mentality.

Garrett has organized and inventoried hundreds of plant signs; assisted with gift shop re-design and build; removed unwanted trees, shrubs, and invasives from the site; and assisted with other back-breaking labor in the meadow and ravines. Garrett has also stepped into numerous roles to help orchestrate successful PLANTFEST! and Spring Fling sales and the Symposium.

Garrett will leave Hilltop for Texas in April, so if you see him at Spring Fling, be sure to pat him on the back and wish him well. He will certainly be missed around Hilltop.

Volunteers provide the power that sustains Hilltop Arboretum, year after year. The efforts of our volunteers bring in thousands of dollars in fundraising and save thousands of dollars in expenses for the Arboretum.

Hilltop is always welcoming new volunteers. To sign up, please email info@friendsofhilltop.org.



Garrett Nielsen staging materials for fence build.



Garrett Nielsen overseeing the shoppers holding area at the Symposium- one of many tasks he assists with during the event.



Garrett Nielsen (L) working hard with Jenneke Visser and Clay Smilie to erect posts for the new fence.



Garrett Nielsen (L), Cooper the Dog, Marcy Hardy, and Virginia Gardner discussing future plans for the nursery.

Summer Camp at Hilltop - REGISTER NOW!

Your children will love these healthy, hands-on outdoor experiences at Hilltop Arboretum where they can play, learn, and develop respect for nature. Children will explore the beautiful trails, pond, and plants and learn about native plant and animal life through hands-on projects and activities. Each day will focus on a nature theme to include outdoor games, "search and discover" hikes, and art projects using natural materials.

Thank you to the EBR Master Gardeners for providing program and volunteer support.

Hilltop is still looking for a few additional camp volunteers. Please email taratitone@lsu.edu if you are interested in teaching a lesson, donating snacks, or assisting with camp logistics.



[Register Here](#)

LSU HILLTOP ARBORETUM
NATURE CAMPS

.....
JUNE 2-6, 2025
 SUMMER SPROUTS
 AGES 4-7

.....
JUNE 9-13, 2025
 BACKYARD HABITAT GARDENER
 AGES 7-10

8:30AM-1PM
COST:
\$185/WK

For more details, visit: www.lsu.edu/hilltop



Campers exploring the meadow.



Campers learning the nature color wheel.

CORPORATE SPONSORS AND PARTNERS



SUPPORT HILLTOP'S PARTNERS

Acadiana Native Plant Project
www.greauxnative.org

Allen Acres - Calendar and Newsletter
www.allenacresbandb.com/calendar

Baton Rouge Audubon Society
<http://www.braudubon.org>

Baton Rouge Green
<https://batonrougegreen.com>

Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society
www.cajunprairie.org

EBR Master Gardener Association
ebrmg.wildapricot.org

LSU AgCenter Burden Museum & Gardens
www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/burden/

Louisiana Master Naturalists of GBR
www.lmngbr.org

Louisiana Native Plant Society (LNPS)
www.lnps.org

Louisiana Wild Society
www.louisianawildsociety.com

Wild Ones Greater Baton Rouge Chapter
greaterbatonrouge.wildones.org



THE 2025 LIBRARY SERIES

A Service of the East Baton Rouge Master Gardeners Association

GOODWOOD LIBRARY	FEB 6 6:30 P.M.	Raised Garden Beds & Containers with Kerry Hawkins Irrigation with Ken Irby
CENTRAL LIBRARY	FEB 13 5:30 P.M.	Tomatoes with Tony Bourgeois Spring Vegetable Gardening with David Breaux
JONES CREEK LIBRARY	MAR 13 6:30 P.M.	Pollination with Carol Paine Native Plants with Gaynelle Wolff
BLUEBONNET LIBRARY	MAR 27 6:30 P.M.	Louisiana Super Plants with Debi O'Neil Pruning Shrubs with Leo Broders
ZACHARY LIBRARY	APR 10 6:30 P.M.	Orchids with Kathy Conerly
CARVER LIBRARY	APR 24 5:30 P.M.	Cutting Gardens with Jay Boudreaux Growing Herbs with Kathy Mullin
GREENWELL SPRINGS LIBRARY	MAY 8 6:30 P.M.	Propagation with Cheri Fasy and other Master Gardeners
BLUEBONNET LIBRARY	MAY 22 6:30 P.M.	Bees with Debi O'Neil
CENTRAL LIBRARY	JUN 12 5:30 P.M.	Summer Survival in the Garden with Ken Irby Gardening with the Handicapped, Children, and the Elderly with Lyn Hakeem
FAIRWOOD LIBRARY	JUN 26 5:30 P.M.	Hydroponics with Kathy Conerly House Plants with Kelly Hebert
ZACHARY LIBRARY	SEPT 11 6:30 P.M.	African Violets with Whitney Briggs Succulents
JONES CREEK LIBRARY	SEPT 25 6:30 P.M.	Fall Vegetable Gardening with David Breaux Cool Season Flowers with Kathy Morris
GREENWELL SPRINGS LIBRARY	OCT 9 6:30 P.M.	Camelias with Bob Dillemoth Lawn Care with Bert Hammett
GOODWOOD LIBRARY	OCT 23 6:30 P.M.	Stop the Weeds with Carol Paine Fruit Trees with Leo Broders



The Louisiana Master Gardener Program is an educational program of the LSU AgCenter. For additional information on the East Baton Rouge Master Gardener Association (EBRMGA), its Library Series or the association's other outreach activities, visit ebrmg.com.

CONNECT WITH HILLTOP



CALL

Call during business hours: 225.767.6916



MEET

Stop in during business hours: Tuesday-Friday, 8:30am - 4:30pm



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TO DATE

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 Follow us on Facebook and Instagram: [@lshilltoparboretum](https://www.facebook.com/lshilltoparboretum)
 View the online calendar of events: www.lsu.edu/hilltop



VOLUNTEER

There are many ways to help out at Hilltop.
 Email info@friendsofhilltop.org to become a volunteer.