

# Columbia ★ Star

Columbia's locally owned weekly newspaper since 1963

## Navigating Natives and Invasives

Stopping to smell the flowers

June 25, 2026

By Arlene Marturano

South Carolina Garden-based Learning Network on Facebook



Female Eastern Box Turtle

One of the largest summer gatherings of formal and informal educators in South Carolina is the Environmental Education Association of South Carolina (EEASC) annual conference. This year's conference theme was Camp Compass—Navigating Environmental Education and it took place at USC Upstate in Spartanburg.

At the culmination of the conference participants were treated to a three-hour native plant walk lead by Rick Huffman, Upstate landscape architect. In 2003, Huffman received the Environmental Educator of the Year Award from EEASC for his work with

school districts, administrators, and teachers to include the outdoor environment as part of K-12 curriculum. In 2006, Huffman received the Governor's Award for Environmental Awareness for his contributions to education and the environment. Huffman founded the South Carolina Native Plant Society in 1996. The organization now has eight chapters and 1,800 members.

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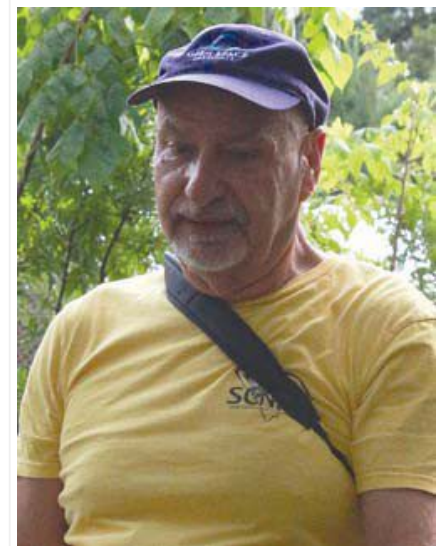


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Conservancy, aka SPACE, Lynn Rhoads, land manager, and Sam Parrott, executive director, joined participants to explain how Spartanburg Area Conservancy has been removing invasive species and bringing back native species at the site. Its mission is to promote, protect, and preserve natural resources and open spaces in the community.

Since 2023, SPACE has partnered with USC Upstate to embark on a sweeping invasive species removal project to improve the forest health for the benefit of wildlife and make the trail safer and welcoming for trail users. Over 300 USC Upstate students have donated service time to transforming the space. Volunteers from Spartanburg Community College, Converse University, and several local businesses have also donated manpower and equipment to assist the revitalization project.



Rick Huffman, Landscape Architect

As participants walked along the trail Huffman pointed out invasive plants in the canopy, understory, and herbaceous layers of the forest: Japanese stiltgrass, tree of heaven, nandina, multiflora rose, Asian white mulberry, and privet. But he also pointed to areas where the invasives had been ripped out and the natives were coming back, and he said, “Plants are resilient.”



American Beautyberry flowers are in

Natives included river cane grass, beautyberry, viburnums, tulip poplar, hackberry tree, white oak, yellow root, dwarf heartleaf, jewelweed, Jack in the Pulpit, deertongue, cinnamon fern, pawpaw, sourwood tree, elephant’s foot, Joe Pye Weed, and Virginia sweetspire. When DeSoto traveled through what is now South Carolina in 1540, his diaries report vast thickets of dense river cane.

x

“Plants have stories to tell. Native Americans used yellowroot, deertongue, and jewelweed as herbal medicines.” Huffman said

not to disturb.

Following the walk, participants queried themselves and each other on how to navigate invasives vs. natives on their home turf.



Virginia Sweetspire Photo courtesy of Eric Beckers, Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

**Upper Chinquapin Greenway Revitalization Project**

Please excuse our mess! SPACE and friends are working hard to remove invasive plants from this landscape to improve our forest health, promote native plant growth, and improve the safety and visibility of this space!




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Easy Coleslaw Dressing  
 ½ cup mayonnaise 2  
 Tbsp. white sugar or to  
 taste 1 ½ Tbsp. lemon  
 juice 1 Tbsp....



## Feathery Flowers

Two years ago mystery  
 plants sprouted in one of  
 my garden pots. I did not  
 plant the seeds for what...



## Star Chefs

Mini Bagel Pizzas 8 mini  
 bagels, split ¼ cup pizza  
 sauce ⅓ cup shredded  
 pizza cheese blend 16  
 slices turkey...

x

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