Blooming into spring

South Carolina Botanical Gardens plan events for spring and summer

BY MONICA KREBER
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CLEMSON — The South Carolina Botanical Gardens (SCBG) is full of so much more than flowers.

Visitors may find children feeding ducks on a pond or a married couple enjoying an afternoon read on a bench.

There is a butterfly garden, a children's garden and exhibits full of plants that are not grown anywhere else in the state. Hikers can check out nature trails, visit the Art Gallery or see the Geology Museum.

Visitors can also just stroll through 295 acres of scenery.

With temperatures going up, the Botanical Gardens, located off Perimeter Road between Highway 76 and Cherry Road in Clemson, has several upcoming events for the public to enjoy.

SCBG Director Patrick McMillan said the most important event to look forward to is the garden's concert series, which will be held spring and autumn, every Saturday at 7 p.m. in the amphitheatre.

"It's a free concert," McMillan said. "Anyone can come and bring a picnic."

McMillan is really excited about the Heritage Garden, which opened Saturday. McMillan said the garden is a big deal because it is opening at a national level.

"When a visitor walks through it, they walk from the mountains to the coast habitat," McMillan said. "The garden is 64 acres, it's huge."

McMillan said the garden has plots full of moisture and soil found in the mountains. SCBG has a habitat for piedmont soil, which gives way for piedmont prairies, which were popular in colonial times.

There is granite flatrock, meadows and a pine savannah. McMillan said SCBG is a popular venue for proposals and weddings.

"The Cove Forest exhibit is a favorite," he said. "It's blistering hot with wild flowers."

SCBG boasts two historical properties. One is the Hanover House, which is open Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. The other is the Hunt Cabin, which is open every Saturday in spring.

McMillan said based on a survey, SCBG gets 250,000 to 400,000 visitors a year.

"The Heritage Garden has been my passion," he said. "I got my Ph.D. in botany, so I've always been in the plant world. I'm a plant geek. It's an ideal dream job."

McMillan said visitation has gone up dramatically in the past year. He said a new desert garden generated a lot of visitors.

"We're continuing to expand that really cool desert garden," he said. "If you walk in there, you feel like you're in Arizona."

SCBG plans to continue developing the Heritage Garden, which is free to visit, throughout the year.

McMillan said all 295 acres are full of "weird, exotic options" of plants – many of which are not found in the state.

"That's what a botanical garden should do: wow you," he said.

Currently the SCBG is in its "busy season," which typically runs from the beginning of March to mid-May. McMillan encourages people seeking solitude to visit the SCBG in June and July.

"It's your garden, and it's a beauty," he said. "It's a good year."

More on the Botanical Gardens can be found on their website: http://www.clemson.edu/public/scbg/.

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