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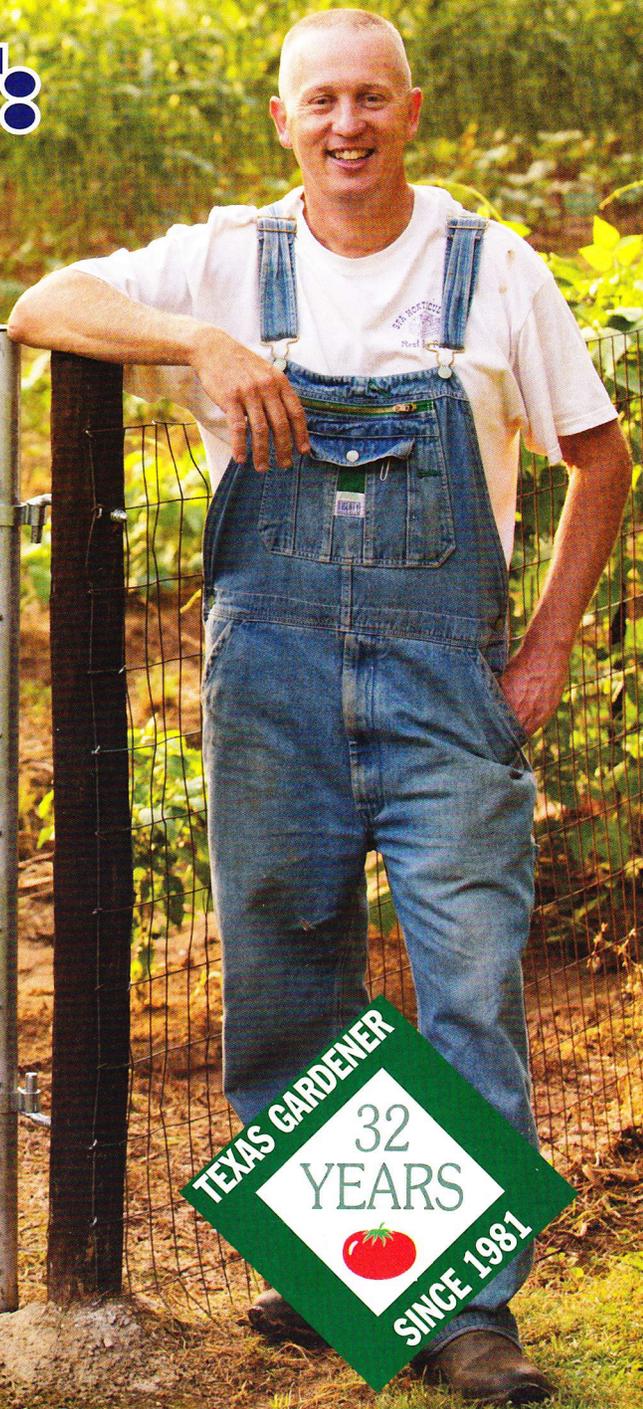
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GREG GRANT: TEXAS PLANTSMAN

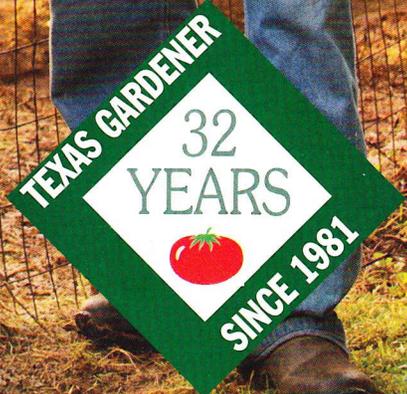
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Dogs love him, plants respect him, older women dote on him, gardeners marvel at him and the earth would be a better place if there were more of him. If you are fortunate enough to be a gardener in the great state of Texas, you have undoubtedly grown, purchased, given, received or admired a plant that has been under his

BY PATTY GLENN LEANDER
Contributing Writer

influence. Thanks to him our gardens spill over with the beauty and color of familiar Texas Superstars that include 'Gold Star' esperanza, 'Laura Bush' petunia, 'Marie Daly' rose and 'Blue Princess' verbena, to name just a few. I'm talking about seventh generation Texan Greg Grant — horticulturist, historian, humorist and certified plant nut.

A native of Longview, Greg's East Texas roots run deep and

wide and his ties to family, heritage and plants have profoundly influenced his life's journey. Enveloped from an early age by the humble existence of his grandparents in Arcadia, it was there that Greg learned many of life's lessons along with a love of the native flora and fauna that would eventually lead him to restore his maternal grandparents' house where he currently resides (see "Heritage, History, Horticulture Keep Grant

Greg Grant

Texas Plantsman



The Emanis House, the restored dogtrot that once belonged to Greg Grant's grandparents and great-grandparents, is now the place that Grant

Busy Year-Round,” page 16). Attracted to flowers and plants from the time he was a tyke, this interest was officially validated in fourth grade when he read a book about another plant-loving young boy who grew up and dedicated his life to plant science and research, George Washington Carver. It was then that he knew he would be a horticulturist. Little did he know that his horticultural journey would soon connect him with

some of Texas’ most esteemed and industrious plant experts: Jerry Parsons, William Welch, David Creech, Sam Cotner, Lynn Lowery and Ying Doon Moy. (See Dr. Jerry Parson’s website for more on Texas’ plant heroes at <http://plantanswers.com/heroes>).

After graduating from Texas A&M, Greg began what he calls his “convoluted career,” which has included impressive (albeit fleeting) stints at the Antique Rose

Emporium, the Texas Agricultural Extension Service in both Bexar County and Cherokee County, as a graduate research assistant and instructor at Louisiana State University, as a horticulturist at the San Antonio Botanic Garden, the Pineywoods Native Plant Center and the Mercer Arboretum, as Director of Research and Development at Lone Star Growers in San Antonio and as a lecturer and research associate at Stephen F.

Austin University in Nacogdoches. He once stated that upon acceptance of a job he also submitted a letter of resignation so that it would be handy. All the while, he's been working tirelessly on breeding, trialing and introducing beautiful and tough new plants to the nursery trade as well as contributing pearls of wisdom and humor via print and web media that includes *Texas Gardener* magazine and the Arbor Gate Nursery blog (www.arborgate.com), winning plenty of acclaim and accolades along the way. He is also an accomplished speaker and author, with five books to his credit, including *The Southern Heirloom Garden* and *Heirloom Gardening in the South*, both co-authored with one of the South's most knowledgeable and talented landscape designers and heritage garden experts, Dr. William C. Welch. In his latest publication, *Texas Fruit and Vegetable Gardening*, Greg shares tips and personal insight on the most popular edibles that can be grown in a Texas garden. I get tuckered out just thinking about his career — how about you?

Whether sharing, teaching, educating or entertaining, Greg is quick to credit his mentors — George Washington Carver, Luther Burbank, Dr. Jerry Parsons and Dr. Bill Welch — for feeding and fueling his passion for plants. Greg jokingly asserts that his “good” bad habits are from Bill Welch and his “bad” bad habits are from Jerry Parsons, but both recognized early on that Greg had an uncanny ability to learn quickly and to disseminate accurate and reliable plant information, along with a unique talent which enables him to hone in on superior plant material for breeding.

In 1987, on the day that Greg showed up to work with Dr. Jerry Parsons at the Bexar County Extension office, Dr. Parsons was taken by surprise, “He looked so young I could hardly believe he had finished high school, much less college.” But the day Dr. Parsons took him to La Pryor, Texas, to see the first large planting of ‘Abbott Pink’ bluebonnets, Greg fell out of the truck humming the

HERITAGE, HISTORY, HORTICULTURE KEEP GRANT BUSY YEAR-ROUND

Greg's uncompromising commitment to heritage, history and conservation, coupled with a quick wit and an incredible array of personal historical references, has garnered a multitude of followers across Texas and beyond. Among them is Linda Lehmusvirta, garden blogger, writer and energetic producer of the long-running PBS broadcast “Central Texas Gardener.” She has known Greg since early in his career and has enjoyed watching him fine-tune his focus over the years, and like many others, she is astounded by how much he knows and the number of plants he's brought into the nursery trade. “I do love him to pieces,” she exclaims. “Greg has the knack of plopping us down right with him in his garden to inhale the scents and taste the flavors that he so loves.”

Greg's horticultural acumen and speaking skills may impress gardeners far and wide, but back home in Arcadia he is just another leaf hanging from the Grant family tree, the youngest of three sons whose “baby brother” status was short-lived by the birth of a little sister soon after he turned one. Jerry Parsons may joke that Greg is “mayor, sheriff, town council and majority owner,” but the residents of this rural East Texas town, population 57, have become accustomed to his shenanigans and adventures over the years as he has schemed and worked to reclaim and restore family property, both inside and out. In 2009, he pooled his time, talent and resources and, enlisting the help of friends and family along the way, set out to restore the house in which he currently resides — an 1890s dogtrot that once belonged to his maternal grandparents, Georgia Marquette and Rebel Eloy Emanis, and before that it belonged to his Grandmother's grandparents. As a young boy he promised Grandmother Emanis that he would look after her house when she was gone and for years he made mental notes and revealed to anyone

who would listen the plans he had to restore the house to its turn-of-the-century condition, using faded photographs, pass-along stories and memories as his guide. He has held to that promise, residing in the farmhouse in its pre-TV and pre-A/C state (he cheats slightly with fans and a window unit for the bedroom during the summer), caring for the property and tending to flowers and vegetables just as his grandparents had done before he was even born.

Just up the road, he also restored and maintains a home from his dad's side of the family, affectionately referred to as “Big Momma's House.” Big Momma was married to Big Dad (their names derived from family rank rather than size), and their daughter was Ruth Smith, Greg's nature-loving Granny who found beauty in every growing, creeping, crawling, breathing, respiring thing. She especially loved flowers, receiving training in floral design from the late Buddy Benz, a factor in Greg's decision to attend the Texas A&M Benz School of Floral Design and pursue a degree in floriculture. It is at this property that Greg “raises cane,” two nameless heirloom, pass-along strains used for making his prized ribbon cane syrup, harvesting the stalks in late November after the nights have cooled and the stalks have sweetened. He also collects antique farm implements, all of which passed through the lives of his East Texas ancestors, every one a reminder of the daily toil of rural living when disease, pestilence and crop failure could bring an already meager existence to insufferable levels. He has worked hard to recreate the interior as well, filling it with many of the original furnishings, including cherished ancestral photographs, rusty iron beds, heirloom quilts and his great-grandmother's quilting frame.

Back at his dogtrot, he raises chickens and grows a row garden of family favorites: ‘Sweet G-90’ corn (“the only

corn my family will eat”), ‘Burgundy’ okra (“because it’s pretty and colored stuff is good for you”) and lots of Southern peas (‘Black Crowder,’ ‘Pinkeye Purple Hull,’ ‘Zipper Cream’ and ‘Golden Eye Cream,’ a highly productive variety introduced by Texas A&M). Behind the house he has fashioned an East Texas Aggie version of a “kitchen parterre” garden out of crown tire planters that he fills with more favorites: ‘Straight Eight’ and ‘Dasher II’ cucumbers, ‘Multipik’ yellow squash, ‘Sweet Banana’ peppers, ‘Sweet Charlie’ strawberries, ‘Climax’ and ‘Tifblue’ blueberries, ‘Bababerry’ raspberries, ‘Purple Podded Pole’ beans and asparagus rustled from an abandoned home place up the road (everything is “up the road” in Arcadia). And he also grows loads of tomatoes, he says, “Since they’re the only reason my family tolerates me!” His favorite and most productive varieties, which he gets from King’s Nursery in Tenaha, include ‘BHN 589,’ ‘Floralina,’ ‘Florida 91,’ ‘Celebrity’ and ‘Tycoon’ — apparently the only tomato Jerry Parsons (who’s all about production) and Bill Adams (who’s all about flavor) have ever both raved about!

Further beyond the house Greg has planted more than 6,000 trees in an 8-acre restoration project he has named The Rebel Eloy Emanis Pine Savanna and Bird Sanctuary, in honor of his Grandfather. Over time he will cull hundreds of pine trees, allowing those that remain to grow to towering heights with ample space between them, just like they did in the original pine savannas of East Texas, creating a natural habitat that will attract birds and wildlife and encourage growth of understory plants. He also performs an annual controlled burn which encourages the growth of low-growing herbaceous plants while preventing catastrophic fires. True to his Aggie education, his property is a “firewise landscape,” incorporating fire lanes, bare dirt, divided roads in and around the property, and a volunteer fire department within 12 miles in three directions from his home.

A confirmed bird-lover, his efforts have already attracted pine warblers, brown-headed nuthatches and woodpeckers. Even as we visited on the farmhouse porch, a pair of bluebirds provided the entertainment, flying back and forth across the garden, doggedly collecting pine straw to build a nest in one of the 120 hand-made birdhouses Greg has mounted throughout Arcadia.

The front of the dogtrot is framed by an old-fashioned cottage garden, filled



The Grants are talented musicians due to the influence of Grant’s former band director father, Neil Grant. Greg Grant learned to play piano and saxophone starting in 3rd grade, and several members of his family, including five nephews and one niece, make up the Arcadia All Star Cowboy Polka Band. Dr. Bill Welch can vouch for Grant’s musical abilities: “Greg can bring a piano to life just like he can do with a garden.”

with plants that he has bred or propagated, some of which became commercial introductions, many with names in honor of colleagues, friends and family, a tribute he reserves solely for those who have passed from this life: *Salvia farinacea* ‘Rebel Child’ (named for his maternal grandfather, Rebel Eloy Emanis), *Lonicera x americana* ‘Pam’s Pink’ honeysuckle (a pretty pink and white heirloom named for Pam Puryear, co-founder of the Texas Rose Rustlers) and *Rosa x polyantha* ‘Marie Daly’ (named in honor of Mrs. Daly), whose gardening aura captivated a young Greg when he mowed her Longview lawn as a boy. One of Greg’s favorites is *Phlox paniculata* ‘John Fanick,’ a heat-tol-

erant, compact, fragrant phlox with light pink flowers and darker pink eyes. Greg found this plant blooming at the home of an elderly lady who lived on Rigsby Street in San Antonio. Following his 10 Commandments of plant rustling, he went to the door, introduced himself and inquired about the plant. She didn’t know anything about it and didn’t mind if he took a cutting. He propagated it and introduced it to the nursery trade, naming it for local San Antonio nurseryman John Fanick. Though he did get a chance to go back to the lady on Rigsby and brag on her flowers, she later died and the house and yard — and the phlox — were destroyed. That’s one reason he always follows one

This dogtrot house belonged to my grandparents, Rebel Eloy Emanis and Georgia Marguerite Wallace Emanis. As a child I promised my grandmother I would take care of it when she was gone and I hope you will do the same. I had it restored to near original condition by friend Larry Shelton of the Libby Community in 2011. In the early days of Arcadia, the people that lived in it ran the general store out front. My grandparents bought the house from my granddaddy's sister and brother-in-law, Voyd and Nora Emanis Hughes, around 1953. After Arcadia got electricity in 1949, the Hughes closed in the dogtrot, lowered the ceilings, and added a lean-to room on the back. Originally there was a kitchen and a dining room across the back. Jim Walker and family lived here beginning in 1916 and ran the Walker and Walker store. My great-great grandparents, Bob and Mary Pate, bought it in 1923. Otho Singleton Cox originally owned the property in 1887 when the Arcadia School (now Newbern Masonic Lodge) property was designated. I wrote about the house in *Heirloom Gardening for the South* (Texas A&M Press, 2011) and refer to it as "the Emanis House." I also wrote about it in the July 2012 issues of both *Southern Living* and *Neil Sperry's Gardens* magazines. I'm not sure when the house was built and whether by Mr. Cox, Mr. Walker, or another, my grandmother thought Mr. Walker did but the architecture seems earlier. The log corn crib moved in from my paternal grandparents (Hoya and Ruth Grant's) place just up the road. The eight acre Rebel Eloy Emanis Pine Savanna and Bird Sanctuary out back should be burned with a prescribed fire in mid-March (Spring Break) every year and never harvested for timber. The 10 acre Trillium Woods Chardwood forest next to the picnic grounds should also never be logged for timber. The "bloody butcher" trilliums (*Trillium recurvatum*) near West Creek are very rare in Texas. Guard them and look after them. The grapevines along the drive should NEVER be topped or cut back. And the assorted Narcissus given plenty of sun, the foliage allowed to go dormant and never mowed until after Mother's Day each year.

-Greg Grant, 2012

Inside the cabinet door of the small bathroom Grant has recorded a brief history of the Emanis House, along with detailed instructions on the care of the surrounding landscape.

of Jerry Parson's Golden Rules of Plant Collecting — always stop and get a plant immediately when you see it.

Though 'John Fanick' phlox remains a favorite of his, after hearing Greg extol the virtues of Turk's cap (*Malvastrum drummondii*), I wondered why we aren't all growing this tough Texas native. Greg describes it as "an upright plant in the sun and a trailing plant in the shade that grows in full sun, full shade, wet soil, dry soil, acid soil, alkaline soil. It's deer resistant, has edible fruit and attracts hummingbirds and sulfur butterflies. And it doesn't demand fertilizer, pesticide or water." And thanks to Greg's tinkering, there is now a pink form, 'Pam Puryear,' and a vigorous white form, 'White Lighting.'

And then there's *Verbena canadensis* 'Rosie,' a pink form of the native East Texas verbena found along the edge of the Sabine National Forest, named in memory of his sweet, devoted terrier,

Rosie, who he still loves and misses, and always will. Buried among the jonquils in front of a weeping cypress, Rosie's unexpected and unexplained passing left an ache deep within, and for her he penned this simple and heartfelt sentiment:

HEAVEN SCENT

Sweeties here,
and sweeties there.
The scent of jonquils
everywhere.

Each passing year
as the pixies bloom,
joy prevails
and conquers gloom.

Along with Southern heirloom plants, old houses, family heritage and birds, Greg loves terriers. No dog will ever replace Rosie, but dogs have been an important part of his life and he is destined to always be in their company. For now

he has his hands full with a feisty new pair of Jack Russell terriers, Acer and Ilex.

Being married to his work allows Greg to dedicate as much time and energy as needed to fulfill his unending list of projects, and living in a house with no TV, no phone, no internet and no central air does a good job of keeping his no loitering policy in effect when visitors linger a tad beyond his comfort level. He notes that there's a direct correlation between those who love him the most and those who live with him the least. "Heck, I toss myself out of the house on a regular basis because I get on my own nerves!" Greg looks after the homestead on his own; he is designer and gardener, supervisor and laborer. And though he claims that he is constantly fighting a natural pigpen tendency that dwells within him, I could see no evidence of such a battle. His home and gardens were impeccably tidy and truly uncluttered and unencumbered by the trappings of the 21st century. The decor of the farmhouse is simple, homey and peaceful. A large wooden bowl of winter squash sits on the kitchen table. In the morning he hangs the family's heirloom quilts on the porch like Tibetan prayer quilts and removes and folds them neatly at night. The whitewashed porch was spotless. During an evening visit to Greg's home, my husband had to chastise me (because Greg is too polite to do it himself) as I bounded up the side steps with dirt-encrusted shoes, unaware that Greg had instinctively removed his shoes before stepping onto the gleaming porch.

Jay White, contributing writer for *Texas Gardener*, echoes the sentiments of Greg's many fans: "Greg Grant is truly amazing. The funny thing is, I really wanted to meet him for all of his horticulture work. Then when I finally met him that was what I cared about the least. I truly admire his love of family and love of history, and the work he has done on the houses and barns is unbelievable. He is just a thoroughly fascinating guy. I have given my wife, Sally, permission to marry him if I die young!"

I'm with Jay. I originally planned to just do an article on Greg's vegetable growing methods, but after a short visit to Arcadia I was easily pulled in by his charms and yarns. Greg has pledged his head, heart and hands to the flora, fauna and people of Texas, and as Texans we are lucky to claim him as one of our own. And thanks to his inspiration and enthusiasm we can all move forward with a renewed sense of optimism and joy about the future of gardening in Texas.

Aggie War Hymn as he pointed out the progeny which would eventually lead to the selection of the 'Texas Aggie Maroon' blue-bonnets. "That was the day," declares Jerry Parsons, "I decided this 'kid' had a gift." According to Dr. Parsons, Greg's gift is his ability to see the potential of public acceptability, marketability and the genetic possibilities of plants. This seems like an obvious trait to possess for a plant breeder or horticulturist, but Dr. Parsons asserts, "It is sorely missing in 99.9 percent of horticulturists and breeders." But all gifts come with a cost and Dr. Parsons was often left with the remnants of a brilliant plant project when Greg's wanderlust lured him away before his idea could be carried to conclusion. As much as he admires and appreciates Greg's handiwork, Jerry Parsons admits, "I become very concerned when Greg tells me he has a plant idea with which 'we' need to work!"

"We make a great team," Greg says. "I come up with silly ideas and crazy dreams, and Dr. Parsons comes up with silly plans and crazy solutions!"

The following account of the creation of the 'Laura Bush' petunia, relayed by Dr. Parsons, is an example of Greg's ability for seeing the potential in plants:

"When Greg looks at a group of plants, he sees every individual plant so he can determine if there is a superior selection in the group. When Greg was leaving San Antonio Extension in 1989, he gave me some petunia seed to plant. He had crossed *Petunia violacea* with an old-fashioned petunia and wanted to see the results. Of course, I planted the seedlings at the San Antonio Botanical Garden and they grew into a beautiful display. I thought all the plants looked about the same with very little variation in flower color or size. When Greg came to

San Antonio, I took him to see the planting and after Greg's careful examination, I asked him if he saw any differences in the plant. He smiled and said: 'Every one of these plants is different!' With that revelation, we took cuttings of every type, rooted them, planted them in the field in the summer to test for heat tolerance, allowed them to endure a cold winter and made the selection from the types which survived. The chosen few selections which survived were named 'Laura Bush.' Wildseed Farms now sells seed of 'Laura Bush' and this petunia have been planted at the White House, at governors' mansions and at the Bush ranch — the results of the genius of Greg Grant."

That's mighty high praise from one of AgriLife's legendary and most opinionated horticulturists, who concludes, "Greg has written for *Texas Gardener* magazine since 2001 and has also authored

The vintage kitchen at Big Momma's House, painstakingly restored to its 1940s condition.





The view of the crapemyrtle allée from the Emanis House porch.

GREG'S NO-NONSENSE APPROACH FOR ENHANCING YOUR GARDENING EXPERIENCE

I asked Greg to share a few tips to help us be better gardeners, and here they are, in his words:

1. For heaven's sake, plant plants that actually grow. Life is way too short to fiddle with plants that belong in another climate. It's better to see what the poor folks, country folks or old gardeners are growing to get a feel for what really works in your area. Brand-new homes and box stores are not the best places for realistic expectations. Find what plants grow best and then pick which colors you like best, not the other way around.

2. Plant your personality. Don't copy what everybody else is doing. Nobody thinks alike, so nobody should garden alike.

3. There's a lot more to gardening than just pretty flowers. Birds, butterflies, other wildlife, fragrances, history, stories behind the plants, etc. are just as (if not more) important.

4. Gardening, like nature, is half death and half life. Don't become discouraged when things die. It happens. Good gardeners kill plants just like bad gardeners; they just replace them faster.

5. Give plants a break. After all, they are producing energy and oxygen, cooling the air, preventing erosion and making the world look better. Stop complaining because your plants don't look like a plastic bouquet from Garden Ridge Pottery.

6. And perhaps the most important tip of all: Don't buy plants based on what they *look like* but what they *will* look like when they are growing and mature. Far too many folks plant the wrong plants (including many that don't even grow here), at the wrong time and in the wrong places just because they look good when they buy them. Always remember that all herbaceous flowering plants bloom more if you plant them before they come into bloom and opposite their blooming season if they are a perennial. Many of the best and rarest plants are always still sitting on the shelves after our famous SFA Gardens plant sales because they don't have blooms on them. I almost never plant plants with blooms on them.

and co-authored numerous books. We are all benefiting from his expertise, historical appreciation and common-sense gardening approach that he incorporates into every book and column."

Jerry Parsons may have helped mold Greg into the plant breeder, horticulturist, educator and cutup that he is today, but Greg was destined to love nature and want to share it due to the early influences of his school-teacher parents and the farmers, gardeners and outdoorsmen who were part of his extended family. His profound knowledge and fervent desire to preserve the horticultural and historical essence of his beloved Pineywoods endears him to his readers, while at the same time he honors those he loves so dearly in the way that he cares for the property, the possessions and the plants they left behind. This reverence for the past is partly due to the genteel persuasions of Dr. William Welch, Texas A&M AgriLife Professor and Landscape Horticulturist, who met Greg in the early 1980s while presenting a class on old roses. Greg, to no surprise, was captivated by the topic and Dr. Welch soon introduced him to the late Pam Puryear, the reigning queen of old roses, which lead to Greg's involvement with the Texas Rose Rustlers and an enduring interest in heritage roses and heirloom bulbs. While Greg credits Dr. Parsons with teaching him everything he knows about introducing new plants, Dr. Welch gets the credit for teaching him everything he knows about the fine art of gardening.

"Yes, I have planted a few 'seed ideas' in Greg's head," states Dr. Welch, "but when I do, he always goes way beyond my expectations and does something spectacular and sometimes a little scary. I honestly don't know how he does so *much so well*. There's no telling what he will do when he grows up!"

Like Jerry Parsons, Bill Welch recognized Greg's exceptional ability to learn and disseminate useful information about new plants, along with his natural ability as a teacher. "I have seen many

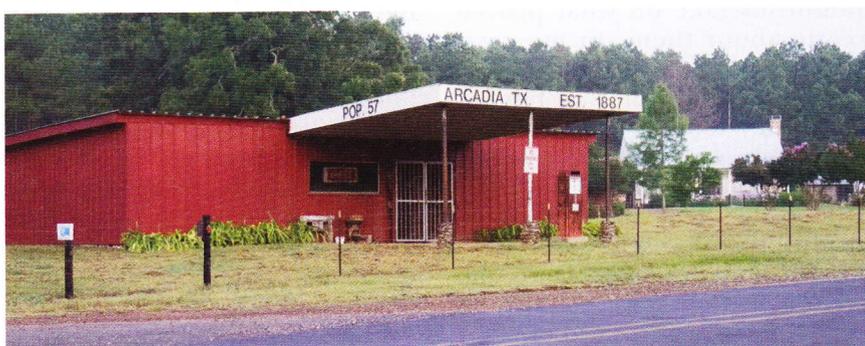


Grant tends rows of heirloom sugarcane up the road at Big Momma's House.

talented and successful students pass through our program in Horticulture during the past 40 years. There are 8 or 10 who I would call spectacular successes. Greg is at the top of that list."

Bill and Greg's first book together, *The Southern Heirloom Garden*, was published in 1995. At that time Greg told Bill, "If I had known how hard it was going to be, I wouldn't have done it!" Yet 15 years later they released an impressive 500-page, full-color revision titled *Heirloom Gardening for the South* and they are now working on their third collaboration, *The Rose Rustlers*.

Through word and deed, and despite debilitating back, neck, hip and shoulder surgeries, Greg continues to dedicate his life to four untiring goals: conservation, restoration, beautification and education. He is a devoted student of landscape design and he spends every waking moment thinking about the next move for his rural landscape. His insight and stories help remind us why we love this state and inspire us to do our part in preserving Texas' past while looking toward its future. As Greg proclaims, "It's a labor of love, of course, and I'll still be working on it when I'm in the casket." TG



The former Arcadia General Store marks the center of town.



Grant's parterre tire garden provides a variety of vegetables, herbs and fruit throughout the year.