

Thursday, Concurrent Sessions 2 (3:30 PM – 4:30 PM)

1. Cultivating Safer Field Spaces: Social Safety in Outdoor Work

Host: Field Exclusive Inc. (Lauren Pharr)

Spending time with plants, whether gardening, hiking, volunteering, or exploring natural areas—can be meaningful, restorative, and joyful. But not everyone experiences plant-rich outdoor spaces in the same way. People from marginalized communities, including those historically excluded because of race, ethnicity, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, or religion, often face added risks or barriers when spending time outdoors. These uneven experiences shape those who feels safe, welcome, and able to engage with plants and nature. Recognizing these realities is an important step toward creating outdoor spaces where everyone can connect with plants, learn, and feel a sense of belonging.

2. Restoring Rare Calcareous Communities in Walker County, GA

Host: Dallas York (Coosa Ecological)

The Chickamauga Valley in northwest Georgia is home to some of the state’s rarest and most unique ecosystems: limestone glades and xeric limestone prairies. Historical maps reveal that these special ecosystems were much more extensive two hundred years ago. Various natural and anthropogenic disturbances have significantly reduced the acreage of limestone glades and prairies in the Chickamauga Valley. While the most well-known and well-documented limestone glades and xeric limestone prairies are federally protected within the Chickamauga Battlefield, most limestone glade remnants remain unprotected. Beginning in May 2025, Coosa Ecological began rehabilitating a 40-acre private property owned by Erin Hendrix in Walker County, Georgia. Despite experiencing various disturbances, this property still contains intact limestone glades and xeric limestone prairies. These rare ecosystems also support eighteen state-listed species. In my presentation, “Restoring Rare Calcareous Communities in Walker County, Georgia,” I will explore the history of the Chickamauga Valley and its rare calcareous communities, the plants and animals that inhabit these ecosystems, the restoration efforts undertaken at limestone glades and prairies on private properties in northwest Georgia, and what the future could hold for these special ecosystems.

3. Building Resiliency from Mountains to the Sea: How Southeast Native Plant Communities Can Protect Cities from Climate Change

Host: Martha Eberle & Katie Ellis

Designers from Bio habitats’ Charleston and Raleigh offices will share proven strategies and hard-earned lessons from active design projects where cross-disciplinary collaboration amongst

engineers, landscape architects, and ecologists is driving innovative solutions for climate resilience. Drawing on work spanning from the mountains of North Carolina to the coast of South Carolina, this session highlights how iterative design approaches grounded in local ecology are addressing the impacts of climate change while simultaneously providing habitat, ecological uplift, and spaces for building community. The presenters will explore some of the most pressing challenges facing Southeastern cities today—from water quality and habitat degradation to flooding—and examine the complexities of meaningfully engaging communities in the design process. Based on recent experience, they will unpack the role of ecological restoration in making the Southeast stronger and more resilient, for both humans and non-humans alike. Topics covered include sea level rise, flooding from historic rain events, heat island effect, and loss of biodiversity. Participants will leave with actionable strategies for advancing climate-responsive design, fostering productive collaboration, and infusing an ecologically grounded approach within a traditional design process. Driven by a mission to “Restore the Earth and Inspire Ecological Stewardship,” Bio habitats is a consulting firm that provides nature-based solutions to help create a resilient world of abundant biodiversity, clean water, and community wellbeing.

4. **Herps in the Garden**

Host: Jimmy Stiles

5. **My Bog Year: Creating a Carnivorous Plant Display at Duke Gardens**

Host: Maegan Lockett

There is nothing in the plant kingdom that stirs the imagination, like carnivorous plants. Here in the Southeast, we are botanically blessed with an impressive array of different carnivorous taxa. As such, starting in 2024, staff of the Blomquist Garden of Native Plants at Duke Gardens undertook the renovation of a neglected corner of their landscape. The aim: to create a new and immersive space that would highlight these wonderful Phyto-oddities. Join Maegan Lockett, Horticulturist of the Blomquist, as she discusses the trials and tribulations, as well as the many joys of creating a plant display focusing on the carnivores and other plant denizens of the Southeastern Coastal Plain.

6. **Versatile, Vivacious (and even some vexing) Viburnums**

Host: Dan Stern

With upwards of a dozen species of viburnum native to different parts of North Carolina, they represent an important part of our understory from the mountains to the coast. The genus is important to wildlife, providing food for a wide variety of pollinators, birds, and small mammals. Dan will provide an overview of the most recognizable characteristics, distribution, and identification tips for our native viburnum species and well as some of the roughly half-dozen non-native species and their cultivars that have, to vary degrees, persisted after cultivation and/or naturalization in different parts of the state. In the cultivated garden, viburnums are often referred to as a four-season workhorse that adds interest throughout the year. Dan will look at native

viburnums through the lens of ornamental horticulture including different ways to use them in the landscape, cultural requirements, noteworthy cultivars, and the biology that informs fruit production.