



UPCOMING FLORAL SHOWS

- June 12—September 12
Love Your Parks
- September 25—November 7
Mushrooms, Mosses, and Mums
- November 20 —January 3, 2022 Holiday Who-Dunnit

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Inside the Domes

MITCHELL PARK HORTICULTURAL CONSERVATORY

Celebrating Milwaukee County Parks



Ask a group of Milwaukeean what they love about our fair city and you might find yourself in a hearty debate about frozen custard, brats, and bubblers. One point most of us agree on is the fact that the Milwaukee County Park System is a treasure and a source of pride.



In this issue, we celebrate our Gold Medal Award winning park system, which is the theme of the “Love Your Parks” 2021 Summer Floral Show in the Show Dome.

Our appreciation for parks goes way back. Wisconsin was the very first state to create a state park. The 61-acre Mitchell Park, where The Domes is located, is the oldest park in the Milwaukee Parks system. See “Milwaukee County Parks by the Numbers” on page 7 for more fun parks data. See page 4 for more about the “Love Your Parks” floral show. And don’t forget to see yourself at several of our parks, pools, and beer gardens this summer!

A Personal Shopper to Lend You a Hand!

Imagine having a personal shopper to help you browse for the perfect gift for a special friend, graduate, teacher, or even essential worker in your life. Imagine doing this from the comfort and safety of your home. Imagine if that shopper was helping you choose from an already carefully curated selection of items, including handmade and locally made items. Imagine this service being affordable and that when you use it you also help support Milwaukee’s one-of-a-kind horticultural conservatory.



Imagine no more! The staff of Gifts Under Glass, the Domes gift shop, are making this service available to you every Tuesday.

Book a Tuesday appointment with Gift Shop Manager Mary Philipp for a virtual shopping experience in the Domes Gift Shop. Mary will take you on a virtual walk through of the gift shop via Zoom or FaceTime. Since the Domes and the shop are currently closed to the public on Tuesdays, you will enjoy an exclusive personal shopping experience. **And remember, FOD members always get an extra 10% off all gift shop purchases!**



Your purchases will be available for curbside pick-up from the Domes at a mutually agreed upon time.

Email Mary at maryphilipp.fod@milwaukeeedomes.org to schedule your virtual shopping experience. Mary will also work with you to plan the easiest way to connect based on the technology you prefer (Zoom or FaceTime).



We Love to Hear From Our Members!

Have a favorite Domes related picture or story to share? If you are a social media user, Facebook and Instagram are excellent places. Another great option is our **new newsletter email address!** Items* sent to this address may end up in this newsletter which is mailed and emailed to FOD members and posted on our website.

Newsletter.fod@milwaueedomes.org *For newsletter communications only; non-copyrighted items only.

Love Your Parks: Summer Floral Show in the Show Dome

By Maria Telikiozoglou,
Show Dome Horticulturist

The summer floral show in the Show Dome “Love Your Parks” will feature an array of brightly colored annual flowers and foliage plants. These will include 'Fire Orange' Zinnias, 'Ping Pong Purple' Gomphrenas, 'Watermelon' Coleus, 'Black and Blue' Salvia, and 'Sedona Sun' ornamental peppers.

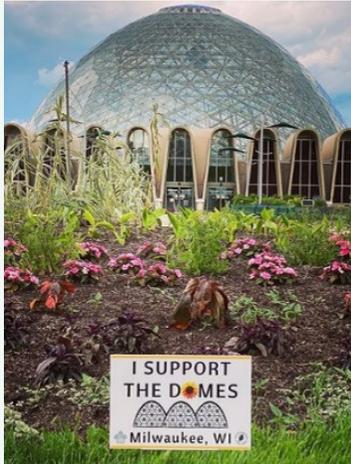
The collage on the right will provide you a sneak peek into the color and texture pallet you will experience in the Show Dome. We also expect to showcase some hop vines to pay tribute to our Milwaukee County Parks beer gardens!



The Perfect Accessory for Your Front Yard

Let your friends and neighbors know how much you love the Domes and that you are proud to support us! We are excited to announce that there are two easy ways to donate to the Friends of the Domes and get your yard sign just in time for summer.

Donate **online**, then pick-up your yard sign at the Domes by visiting the **Donations Page** on our website at:



<https://store.milwaukeedomes.org/category/Donations>



Or
 Donate **in the Gift Shop** and take one home that very day. Your yard will be the talk of the neighborhood!

A Humble Thank You to America's Heroes— The Purple Heart Pass

Milwaukee County Veteran's Services offers a special benefit to a special, highly honored group of Americans, recipients of the Purple Heart award. The Purple Heart Pass was created to recognize the sacrifice made by veterans wounded during action with an enemy of the United States. It is a small way to say thank you for service members' incredible sacrifices. The Purple Heart Pass grants Wisconsin's Purple Heart recipients a free pass to some of Milwaukee County's world class attractions, including the Mitchell Park Domes, Milwaukee Public Museum, and the Harley-Davidson Museum. There are additional attractions across the state, like the EAA Museum in Oshkosh and the Green Bay Packers Hall of Fame.

Please contact Milwaukee County Veterans Services (414) 266-1234 for more information about the Purple Heart Pass.

The Mitchell Park Domes is proud to be a part of this program.



MILWAUKEE COUNTY
Veterans' Services

Purple Heart Pass
 Free Admission to State Attractions for Veterans

[county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Veterans-Services/Purple-Heart-Pass](https://www.county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Veterans-Services/Purple-Heart-Pass)



A NATURE MOMENT WITH MR. PETE

Did you know that we're on Youtube?! Check out this and many more FREE nature-focused activities for children, adults, and families on our Domes @ Home website

Find stories, crafts, & activities for kids and families at the Domes @ Home page!



FRIENDS OF THE DOMES

- Meet Mr. Pete**
 Friends of the Domes
 875 views • 9 months ago
 4:37
- How to Build a Raised Bed Garden Part 2 - with Erica!**
 Friends of the Domes
 189 views • 8 months ago
 9:58
- Story Time with Friends of the Domes: The Story of the Little...**
 Friends of the Domes
 66 views • 10 months ago
 8:59

An At-Home Activity - Window Seedling Greenhouses

Ms. Julie teaches us about seed germination through this fun and interactive activity! We'll combine art and science by creatively decorating our greenhouse and watching our seeds sprout and grow.

[milwaukeedomes.org/domes-home](https://www.milwaukeedomes.org/domes-home)

Milwaukee County Parks By the Numbers

A Few Fun Data Points about the Parks We Love!

For more fascinating Milwaukee County Parks historic photos and facts, visit the recently updated Milwaukee County Parks Website (at <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks>), go to “What We Do” then select “History.” The creation and story of each park reflects the history, residents, and community leadership of its neighborhood. The creation of the County Parks reflects our shared history and values.

For more on the history of the Park System, check out the radio story “How Milwaukee’s Parks Came to Be” on the WUWM website <https://www.wuwm.com/environment/2017-10-16/how-milwaukee-countys-parks-came-to-be>



Photo Credit: Milwaukee County Parks; WUWM Website

158

Park sites in the Milwaukee County Park System, from Alcott to Zeidler



Additional parks are operated by other entities including Milwaukee Public Schools Recreation Department and local municipalities

0.4

Smallest Park*, 0.4 acre
Gilman Triangle

0.5

2nd Smallest, 0.5 acre
Riverfront Launch Site

0.6

3rd Smallest, each 0.6 acre
Burns Commons
Prospect Triangle

626.6

Largest Park* 626.6 acres
Whitnall Park

381.1

2nd Largest, 381.1 acres
Grant Park

362.5

3rd Largest, 362.5 acres
Brown Deer Park

1936

The Milwaukee County Park system began with the creation of many small parks across the city. In 1936, the Milwaukee City Parks and County Parks merged to form the Milwaukee County Park System.

Over
125

Miles of paved trails for walking, running, and biking, plus hundreds more unpaved miles for hiking, mountain biking, & river sports



Over
15,000

Acres of land managed Milwaukee County Park System, from Brown Deer in the North to Oakwood in the South



*All data, including park size data, is from the Milwaukee County Parks website, April 2021. Largest/ smallest park size data includes only parks managed by the County Park System and for simplicity, does not include parkways.

2



Outdoor waterparks

2



Indoor pools open year round

8

Splashpads



25

Neighborhood wading pools

5



Parks Beer Gardens

2



Traveling Beer Gardens serving from

2



Vintage Firetrucks stopping at

10

Different parks through the summer.

Why I Love the Domes

Your support makes experiences like these possible!

Being a member of the Friends of the Domes means that YOU help to keep the Domes a vibrant, inspiring, restorative destination for all who visit. We are excited to share some of the photos and replies we recently received when we asked people to share “Why I love the Domes” on Facebook and Instagram. Your support makes feelings and experiences like these possible!

Adult Workshops & Education

[Lakeshore Birding Workshop] It's great to get outside to appreciate what our lakeshore has to offer. The guide was so patient and knowledgeable. I would do this again in a heartbeat.



As the alarm rings loudly that Mother Nature needs help, programs like the “Wild Gardening Workshop” show us how to help. Well done!

Membership & History

I have recently become a member because I have enjoyed this outstanding, educational, unique garden park for six decades and want to see it remain a Milwaukee landmark.

Therapeutic Value

I always find peace at the Domes, striking a yoga pose or closing my eyes to take in the sounds and smells! The Domes gives us life to enjoy and scenery to be part of and appreciate. So much goodness can be found here; I only hope more families can find their natural urban retreat like we have.



We get excited to visit the Domes, especially during winter pandemic when life was not quite as green or rosy for anyone (literally and metaphorically speaking).

Creating Family Memories

My daughters like listening to Mr. Pete, checking in on Steve the Bearded Dragon, and of course watching the koi fish on the newly renovated bridge. We enjoy laying on the benches and looking up at the sunshine and laughing. Shirley always likes the triangle shapes of the glass, checking on the bananas and new pineapple, and the fairy garden. Judy likes to run around the lobby, tricking me into thinking she will touch the cactus needles or the hot peppers in the desert dome, and playing chase with the trains.

Events & Celebration Kits, like Dia de los Muertos

We loved the event! Please do it virtually again because we have small children who probably won't be able to be vaccinated by fall.



Looking to Help the Parks?

It is no secret that the County Parks budget has been repeatedly cut over the last few decades. As a member of the Friends of the Domes, you already help one of the unique, complex parks in the Milwaukee County Park System. To help more: visit the parks and pools with friends and family; talk up your favorite parks; meet your friends at a beer garden and purchase food and beverages (See back cover for the Traveling Beer Garden 2021 Schedule). To do even more, check out:

Parks People <https://parkpeoplemke.org/> Check out their summer PARKticipation program! The website includes many ways to get involved and help including volunteer opportunities and sponsoring a tree or bench.

Parks Foundation <https://www.mkeparksfoundation.org/> An outlet for everyone in Milwaukee County and beyond to support the Milwaukee County Parks system, with the belief that these are our parks, this is our community, and this is our future.



2

Organizations

MANY

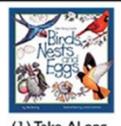
Reasons AND Ways to help

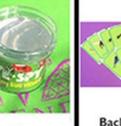
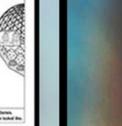
Friends of The Domes Family Education Program

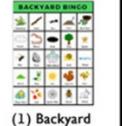
Start This Summer's Adventures with an Adventure Activity Kit!

Each kit contains equipment, activities, and instructions related to an environmentally-focused topic. Activities for both indoor and outdoor adventures will allow your young ones to explore the backyard natural world and the living things that occupy it. Building a bird feeder, planting an herb garden, catching an insect, or discovering what lives in your backyard are just a few activities your child can enjoy at your home, in a park, or on vacation!

Choose from Backyard Bug Buddies, Backyard Nature Detective, Beginning Birding, or Growing with My Garden. Each kit also includes its own carrying bag, a Domes sticker, and Domes coloring pages. All of the Friends of the Domes Activity Adventure Kits can be purchased through our website or from the Domes gift shop. [Click here to order your Activity Adventure Kit](#) and start your adventure today!

 <h3>Beginning Birding</h3> <p>ACTIVITY ADVENTURE KIT</p>				
 (1) Hummingbird Feeder Project	 (1) Take-Along Guide, Birds, Nests, & Eggs	 (1) Build Your Own Bird Feeder Project		
LEARN		DISCOVER		
 (1) Birds iView Window Clings	 (1) Economy Kid's Binoculars	 (1) Domes Sling Bag		
EXPLORE		PLAY		
 (1) Domes Sticker	 (4) Coloring Pages	 (1) Birding Bingo Set (5 players)		

 <h3>Backyard Bug Buddies</h3> <p>ACTIVITY ADVENTURE KIT</p>				
 Take Along Guide: Caterpillars, Bugs & Butterflies	 Economy Insect & Butterfly Net	 Bug Viewer	 Backyard Bug Memory Set	 Coloring Sheets
EXPLORE	LEARN	DISCOVER	PLAY	
 Incredible Insect Project	 Bug Pooter Project	 Domes Stickers	 Cinch Bag with Logo	Visit our web page at milwaukeehomes.org for future Activity Adventure Kits and "A Nature Moment with Mr. Pete!"

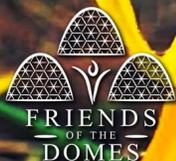
 <h3>Backyard Nature Detective</h3> <p>ACTIVITY ADVENTURE KIT</p>		
 (1) Backyard Bingo Set (5 players)	 (1) Hand Lens	 (1) Small Square: Backyard Nature Detective Resource
LEARN	DISCOVER	
 (1) Weather Window: Cloud ID Project	 (1) Domes Sling Bag	 (1) Animal Track ID Project
EXPLORE	PLAY	
 (1) Bug Box	 (1) Domes Sticker	 (4) Coloring Pages

 <h3>Growing With My Garden</h3> <p>ACTIVITY ADVENTURE KIT</p>				
 Wildflower, Blooms and Blossoms Take Along Guide	 Preschool Age Kids Gardening Tote	 Root Observation Station Project	 Herb Garden Greenhouse Project	 Butterfly Garden Starter Project
EXPLORE	LEARN	DISCOVER	PLAY	
 Garden Plants Memory Set	 Seed Necklace Project - Nature Moment Video	 Coloring Sheets	 Domes Sticker	 Cinch Bag with Logo

Purchase in the gift shop today!

Also available online:

www.milwaukeehomes.org



From the Director

By Doris Maki, Horticultural Services Director Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory

Hello Friends,

Happy Hope Season! With longer and warmer days, buds and blooms of all colors and shapes, and the COVID-19 vaccine rollout underway, we all feel hopeful. The Domes will remain open this summer, and we have been safely and successfully open since last September. We are still operating on a reservation system and with limited services and limited hours; but I am hopeful that we can accommodate more services and welcome more visitors as the pandemic numbers drop and our immunity grows.

Thank you for standing by The Domes during these very difficult times. We all have experienced losses of some sort over the last year and a half, but I have always found hope in the sense of community that The Domes promotes and honors. We hope to see you at The Domes soon.

Be well and stay safe.



Reciprocity: Another Valuable Benefit of Your FOD Membership!

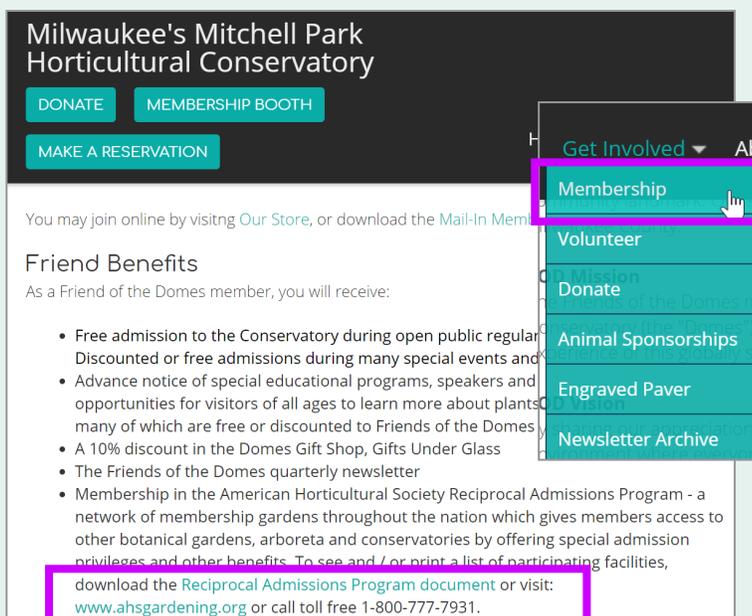
As more people are getting vaccinated and planning travel, remember that FOD members have an excellent benefit for saving money. Your membership provides you with free or discounted admission to hundreds of gardens, arboretum, conservatories, and even some zoos and aquariums.

For a full list of participating organizations, visit the Friends of the Domes website, click Get Involved, then select Membership. In the list of [Friend Benefits](#), you will see "Reciprocal Admissions Program Document" in blue, click to see a list of all reciprocal gardens.

OR go directly to the American Horticultural Society's Website www.AHSGardening.org and view the list of reciprocal gardens on their site.

If you have not yet renewed your membership since the Covid closure of the Domes in 2020, and your membership card displays an expired date...

Remember that you can view your **updated** membership expiration date by visiting our website and clicking the **Membership Booth** button in the upper left corner of the main page. Enter your Member ID number and last name to verify your membership status. Use your mobile phone to look up the updated expiration date (and show it to admissions staff) if you are using your membership for reciprocity at another garden. You will receive your new permanent membership card next time you renew.



www.AHSGardening.org

Your Passport to Public Gardens Across North America!

A current membership card from the American Horticultural Society ([join now](#)) or from a garden participating in our Reciprocal Admissions Program (RAP) entitles you to special admission privileges and discounts* at 345+ gardens throughout North America!

COVID-19 Update: As gardens begin to reopen, many have limited visitation and other special conditions. Please be patient and as always, call ahead to determine what RAP benefits are being offered. Gardens to honor recently expired membership cards for members of AHS and part



Photos on the left were taken by a FOD member who enjoyed free admission to the stunning San Diego Botanic Garden in January 2020!



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Education Center Updates

Children’s Education Program: Virtual Science Live!

Although we were not able to welcome student field trips to the Domes this school year, the education staff were busy teaching in a new way - through live virtual science classes with Mr. Pete. Listed are a few of the goals we met this semester.

- 4 brand new programs created, with curriculum meeting several state science standards
- 1,450 children participated in our programs
- Mr. Pete led 50 programs, serving 58 classrooms
- \$4,900 worth of scholarships awarded

We would like to thank our community partners SHARP Literacy and Milwaukee Public Schools for supporting our program and helping teachers connect with us. We are also grateful to Dr. & Mrs. John Thomas and the Holz Family Foundation for their donations to our scholarship fund.

Oak Trees & Native Bees: Education Staff Development

A strong Education Program requires a commitment to continued education for our staff. Our Education staff were able to be students, collaborators, and networkers themselves at several events this spring!

Education Director, Erica Putman and Lead Interpretive Educator, Pete Stobie attended a five-day Partners for Pollinators Spring Author Speaker Series in March 2021 hosted by The Ohio State University College. Topics included “Oak Trees: The Rich Ecology of Our Most Essential Native Trees,” “Wasps: Their Biology, Diversity, and Role as Beneficial Insects and Pollinators of Native Plants,” “Solitary Bees: Biology, Conservation, Evolution,” “Common Bees of Eastern North America,” and “Good Garden Bugs: Everything You Need to Know about Beneficial Predatory Insects.”



Education Center Updates, Con’t on page 10

Letter from the FOD Executive Director

Hello Friends,

With summer right around the corner, it's time to get back out and enjoy our parks! The summer floral show opening June 12 will highlight ways to enjoy our wonderful Milwaukee County Parks. See even more Parks fun in this newsletter!



We are full swing into a Membership Drive to bring a wider awareness to the community of the benefits of being a member of the FOD. Most of you reading this newsletter are already members but you can still participate. As part of this drive we are offering a **Pay it Forward Option**. We have partnered with our neighboring Clarke Square

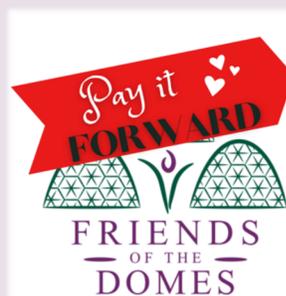
Neighborhood Initiative to offer gift memberships to community members who may not be able to afford one. You can help these families enjoy the Domes located in their own neighborhood. Visit the [Membership store page of our website](#) to purchase a gift and help to make it possible for all families to enjoy our Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory.

Another opportunity to show your support of the Domes is to display an "I Support the Domes" yard sign. You can

get one with any size donation to the Friends of the Domes (See page 3 for details).

As always, thank you for being a Friends Member and for your continuing support of Milwaukee's iconic horticultural conservatory.

Sally Sullivan
FOD Executive Director



Pay it Forward - Family Membership

Product No. PIF

Purchase a gift membership for a community member who may not be able to afford one. Help make it possible for all families to be able to enjoy the Domes. (We will match the membership to a family who has applied to participate in the offer.)

\$ 50.00 [ADD TO CART](#)

The Voice of a Volunteer

By Kent Hadley,
FOD Volunteer

I have taken part in several volunteer opportunities at the Domes over the past few years from working at the News Year's Eve celebration and Story Time with the kids, to pushing a cart of plants around for people to smell and touch. However, if you visited during a train show you probably saw me running the trains. I am not a big train fan, but I am a big Domes fan. I arrive before the Domes open to start the trains, then I get to walk around the Show Dome alone; enjoying the fresh smells of the many blooms and discovering new plants on every walk. When the Domes open, I am always sitting at the depot watching the doors as they explode open and the kids run in, screaming at the wonders they see before them. This never gets old.

I started coming to the Domes when we moved to Milwaukee more than forty years ago. My first trip was as a chaperone for my daughter's class. Being the only dad chaperone, I was assigned to watch the boys and keep them entertained. Yes, we were the ones pitching pennies in the Tropical Dome, but at least it kept the guys from tossing them in with the goldfish. I never missed a chance to chaperone after that first time. When our grandchildren were born, I became the babysitter, and the Domes were an integral part of my week. It wasn't until my third grandchild that I realized how much money I could save by joining the Friends. It goes without saying that after I joined the Friends, the Domes took a severe financial hit. Once I became a Friend of the Domes, I didn't need a reason to visit the Domes, I could go, and did go, anytime I wanted.

I started volunteering for the Domes after the grandkids were in school full-time, and I was retired full-time. The Domes offer me a chance to interact with people and to be surrounded by beautiful sights and smells. As a city dweller it does not get any better than that. I look forward to when the Domes are fully open, and I can return to my cart and reading stories to the kids.

Thank you for volunteering and for sharing your story Kent!

If you have volunteered at the Domes and would like to share a story, experience, and/or photo, please email us at newsletter.fod@milwaueedomes.org. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator Carrie Kelroy at carriekelroy.fod@milwaueedomes.org.



Growing Sausages on Trees

By Mary Braunreiter,
Show Dome Horticulturist

One of the many fascinating, extraordinary species in the Tropical Dome is the Sausage Tree, *Kigelia africana*. Its large flowers and fruit are almost impossible to miss! The trees are native to Africa where leaves and fruit have some medicinal uses. The fruit is poisonous and strongly purgative to humans, but in parts of Kenya it is dried and processed carefully with bee pollen and honey to make a fermented drink. Some animals, like baboons, cattle, elephants, and giraffes can eat the fruit. The story of its annual pollination process is equally interesting.

Every spring, volunteers and staff from The Domes and the Lincoln Park Conservatory in Chicago take turns delivering flowers from their respective Sausage Trees to each other for the purpose of pollination.

The trees will not bear fruit unless they are cross pollinated with another tree. The trees have evolved in this way to ensure genetic diversity. On April 21, 2021 volunteers from the Lincoln Park Conservatory's nonprofit partners drove up to Milwaukee with a cooler containing several flowers from their Sausage Tree. I put their flowers in the refrigerator and gave them several flowers from our Sausage Tree to take back to Chicago. Later, I went up on the Tropical Dome's catwalk where I could reach the hanging flower clusters to pollinate the pistils (female parts) of our flowers with the anthers (pollen bearing portion of the stamens, male parts) from their flowers. As you can see in the photos, when the flowers fall from the tree the stamens are still attached but the pistils stay on the tree.

Less than one week later you can see the baby sausages growing on the tree.

The sausages continue to grow and can get as large as two feet long and weigh about fifteen pounds. They hang on the tree for about a year. I don't pollinate flowers above the walking path as it could be quite painful if a sausage fell on a visitor!

Without our partnership with The Lincoln Park Conservatory, and our nonprofit support groups, our Sausage Tree would not have the impact of this spectacular fruit display.



Baby sausage fruit, about one week old



Growing and Full grown sausage fruit



***K. Africana* in the Serengeti National Park; photo from Wikipedia**

Education Center Updates, Con't from page 8

Pete also joined 110 fellow interpreters for a National Association for Interpretation (NAI) workshop. The workshop highlighted the importance of creativity, hiking outside, the teaching resource of food, and even graphic design tips for interpretive educators. There were opportunities to connect with other professionals in the field for ideas, support, and guidance. The discussions were truly inspiring and the knowledge will be applied at the Domes. The Friends of the Domes education staff will continue to reflect on our program's vision as we move into the next stage of development. We would like to extend a huge thank you to the Friends of the Domes for supporting the Education Staff and allowing us to attend these conferences and webinars. We know we are not alone in our efforts.

THE FRIENDS OF THE DOMES

Green Sheet

Summer 2021

Leaping Lemurs!

The Story of the Domes' Unique Madagascar Collection

By Marian French,
Horticulturist

Where does the story of the Domes' Madagascar collection begin? Maybe with the start of construction of the Domes in the 1960s? Or maybe with the completion of the Desert Dome in 1967? Actually, the plants themselves, and the curation of an entire inventory of species, became part of the Domes in the 1980's.

For almost 20 years, the entire north-western edge of the Desert Dome was populated with an assortment of African plants, including several large trees. The Director of the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory at that time, Richard Risch, was a knowledgeable botanist and a fan of succulents. Risch's vision was to assemble a first-of-its-kind Madagascar collection for a municipal conservatory. In the early 1980's however, the succulent trade was not nearly what it is today. In some cases, international correspondence was required to obtain seed and plants. Various nurseries within the United States and abroad were contacted, including one large nursery still operating today – Glasshouse Works. This Ohio greenhouse had (and still has) a diverse list of offerings and was able to supply many unique specimens for the Domes collection. Mr. Risch passed away, but he is forever memorialized at the entrance of the Desert Dome with a glass panel that bears his name and, of course, a depiction of Madagascar flora and fauna. Look for it at the western entrance to the Desert Dome, after you exit the Show Dome doors. More importantly, he left the legacy of a beautiful and entrancing collection of plants celebrating the habitats of an exotic land.

The island of Madagascar is large and has different climates that vary from humid rainforest to arid scrubland, the latter being of particular interest to our collection. Most of our specimens are native to the southwestern corner of Madagascar, which has the



driest climate. The plants in this region have adapted to very, very scarce rainfall. Thorns and prickles are everywhere as defense against herbivory. If you have visited the arid collection in the winter, you may have noticed not just the thorns, but also the yellowing or falling leaves that grow amongst them. This is an annual event in the Desert Dome - the short, dark days of our winter slow the plants' growth and cause many of them to go dormant for a month or two. In response to this, we also reduce watering. The lack of "rainfall" can also trigger leaf drop in arid plants. The upside to this seasonality is that in spring, the lengthening days and warmer temperatures bring about optimistic new growth. The sun shining through bright green leaves is one of the happiest signs of spring under glass.

Some of the stars of the collection are the alluaudias. The two largest in the Desert Dome are *Alluaudia procera* and *Alluaudia ascendens*, but in total we have four species of *Alluaudia* and two species of *Didieria*, a close relative. What makes them stand out is immediately apparent – they grow as tall as trees, have succulent trunks, and are absolutely covered in spines and tiny leaves. Sometimes they can form very odd shapes with all of their crazy branching habits. Because of this branching, one species, *Didieria trollii*, has been dubbed the Octopus Tree. Together, they can form an ecosystem unique to Madagascar known as the spiny forest, where the canopy is made up of needle-sharp points and the understory composed of other, mostly pointy, succulents.

It is difficult to imagine that such a hostile, alien landscape could exist and even more astonishing to discover that animals survive and thrive there as well. Part of the amazing story of the alluaudias is that their spines can only deter so many creatures and that one purposefully seeks them out for food. Lemurs are well

known for being adorable and fascinating natives of Madagascar. They are also the main herbivores that feed on alluaudia. The idea of trying to pick out the tiny leaves from between each set of needles seems painful to say the least, but the fact that these lemurs perch on the trunk (also covered in spines) to do this is even more incredible. Possibly the most jaw-dropping feat of all is that these animals can routinely jump from one alluaudia to the next without pricking any of their toes or skewering themselves in the process. Leaping lemurs!

Unfortunately for visitors, we don't have any lemurs in our collection, but we hope our daz-



Lemur on an alluaudia

zling array of Madagascar species will make up for it. The diversity present on one tropical island is mind-blowing. These plants look like nothing else in the world. Each specimen living in this planting represents species that are, in many cases, critically endangered in their native land. Being an island, there is no where to go when habitat is destroyed for agriculture or ranching. Both plant and animal species are in trouble in places like Madagascar, where humans have to try to live side by side with nature in a limited area of land.

In a way, we all live on a sort of "island" – our backyards, our neighborhoods, our cities. Maybe the lessons of Madagascar can make us think about our own land and what flora and fauna we share it with. Next time you visit us at the Domes, take a moment to treasure our storied collection from a distant land. When you get home, take another moment to reflect on your own native stories and to appreciate the unique things growing around you.



Alluaudia procera



Alluaudia ascendens



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This issue is dedicated to our beloved Milwaukee County Parks!

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2021 Milwaukee County Parks/ Sprecher Traveling Beer Garden Schedule

Get together with friends and support your Parks!

May 19—June 6

West Milwaukee Park, 5000 W. Burnham St., West Milwaukee

June 2—June 20

Cooper Park, 8701 W. Chambers St.

June 9—June 27

Doctors Park, 1870 E. Fox Lane, Fox Point

June 23—July 5

Grant Park, 100 Hawthorne Ave., South Milwaukee

June 30—July 18

Greenfield Park, 2028 S. 124th St., West Allis

July 7—July 25

Lake Park, 2975 N. Lake Park Road

July 21—August 8

Froemming Park, 8801 S. 51st St., Franklin

July 28—August 22

McCarty Park, 8214 W. Cleveland Ave.

August 11—September 6

Juneau Park, 900 N. Prospect Ave.



Traveling Beer Garden Hours: Mondays through Fridays, 5:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M.; Saturdays, Sundays, and Holidays 11:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M.

More Info At: <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Experiences>