

## **BOTANICAL GUARDIANS AND THE NATIVE PLANT INITIATIVE AT THE STATE BOTANICAL GARDEN OF GEORGIA.**

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The Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance (GPCA) is a statewide network of botanical gardens, state and federal agencies, academic institutions, and NGOs. GPCA's team of specially trained volunteers, the Botanical Guardians, is coordinated by the State Botanical Garden of Georgia (SBG). These volunteers work throughout the state on a variety of conservation projects. In the early years of the program they focused on historic species searches and stewardship of special management areas. As the team of volunteers grew and their dedication and skill was demonstrated, GPCA members came to depend on Botanical Guardians for help with in a wide variety of programs. Today, Botanical Guardians are involved in every aspect of plant conservation including species monitoring, plant collecting, restoration, reintroduction, propagation, trail maintenance, and land stewardship. Another expansion of SBG's conservation program during the last decade has been the propagation of native and rare flora for native plant restoration, education, and safeguarding projects. Inspired by the amazing work being done through the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, the Plant Conservation Program at SBG is now creating a Native Plant Initiative to create a network of native plant growers and stakeholders in the state of Georgia. SBG will serve as a center for researching and coordinating regionally appropriate plant material and will promote the use of native flora along our state roadsides, power line right of ways, and in the residential landscape. Both the Botanical Guardians and the Native Plant Initiative are innovative ways that the State Botanical Garden of Georgia is working to protect and promote native plant habitats in the state of Georgia.