

## Front Lines

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### Illuminating the Garden

*Jennifer Polanz*



We have a story in this month's issue on outdoor lighting in the garden, but Bellingrath Gardens & Home public gardens in Theodore, Alabama, are taking it to the extreme with its inaugural Gulf Coast Chinese Lantern Festival. The event started in April and runs through June 15, turning the gardens into a "luminous dreamscape," featuring 41 towering handcrafted light sculptures.

The displays tell stories as guests wander through the gardens, with illuminated lanterns portraying plants, animals and fantastical creatures. The tickets are sold separately from regular day tickets and guests can enjoy the lanterns from 5:00 to 10:00 p.m. Thursday through Sunday while the event occurs. It's a unique way to bring visitors to the gardens and create excitement.

"We launched the Gulf Coast Chinese Lantern Festival because we know how much our visitors love our holiday light show (Magic Christmas in Lights) and we've long wanted to have a spring festival—this show represents the best of both worlds for us," said Bellingrath Executive Director Todd Lasseigne. "The lanterns are truly stunning pieces and their oversized scale fits in with our 65 acres of gardens. From the initial results, we feel that we're hitting a home run, as our visitors love and are raving about the combination of beauty inspired from Chinese history and folklore, combined with the natural wonders and elegance of Bellingrath Gardens!" **GP**