

A visit to the garden of 'A Man Named Pearl'

By Arthur O. Tucker
Delaware State University

Gardening friends had recommended the 2006 documentary video "A Man Named Pearl", so we put it into our Netflix sequence.

I think that the introduction on the DVD case summarizes this most eloquently:

"When Pearl Fryar and his wife sought to buy a house in an all-white neighborhood of Bishopville, S.C., they were dissuaded ... Remarkably, instead of fueling bitterness and anger, this comment motivated Pearl to win Bishopville's 'Yard of the Month' award and, eventually, to transform his ordinary suburban yard into a horticultural wonderland. The topiary garden's centerpiece emblazons both its message and Pearl's own philosophy: 'Love, Peace, and Goodwill.'"

Garden Tales

We had a friend visiting from Australia, so, armed with some audio books, off to Bishopville, S.C. we went! We were all truly amazed, not only by the living sculptures, but also by the metal sculptures and Pearl himself. While we were there, visitors of all ethnic and socioeconomic groups pulled up for tours, and Pearl greeted them all. Pearl routinely entertains busloads of school children, which seem to be his fa-

vorite tours. This is an inspiring man! Starting with no horticultural training and using plants discarded as "worthless" by the local nursery, Pearl transformed a former cornfield into a three-acre garden worthy of Disneyworld or any botanic



Submitted photo

Pearl Fryar's garden in Bishopville, S.C. was featured in the 2006 documentary "A Man Named Pearl."

garden. He is infectious, and many of his neighbors have also caught the "bug." He has also revitalized Bishopville itself, and his living sculptures can be seen all over the town. Heading out of Bishopville, we stopped

at the nearby Fatz for their Calabash chicken. Calabash cooking is a local favorite in which chicken or seafood is first soaked in buttermilk overnight, providing a unique flavor and moistness. Next, we toured the Charleston Tea Plantation, America's only tea plantation with roots in the late 1800s.

Located on scenic Wadmalaw Island in the "Low Country" just outside of Charleston, this farm has been recently acquired and modernized by Bigelow.

They produce black and green teas, as well as flavored teas. Gilligan's on nearby James Island offered good, local seafood.

If you visit Pearl's garden, ask to buy an autographed copy of his video. His garden has now been incorporated as a nonprofit organization with hopes for preservation under The Garden Conservancy. The Charleston Tea Plantation also has a good short video for sale.

On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 302-857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call 302-857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.