

JOB TALK

Garden is a challenge of historic proportions

■ As the oldest and perhaps the finest landscaped garden in America, South Carolina's Middleton Place exemplifies Southern low country plantation life and style of the 18th and 19th centuries. Classic gardens designed with geometric precision and logic are the highlight of this pastoral plantation near Charleston.

As horticulturist for the historic site, Sidney Frazier is guardian of a 250-year tradition of landscaping excellence. Whenever possible, Frazier emphasizes preserving that history by using species that were part of the garden's original designs.

Frazier's maintenance methods, honed over 20 years, are labor intensive.

"It all has to be weed-free, passable and presentable," he says. "The paths have to be hand-raked, sometimes twice a week, and many of the shrubs have to be pruned for shape, fertilized and sprayed three times a year. The lake and ponds have to be kept up as well. That's a lot of maintenance."

Color philosophy—In the garden proper, color is a vital detail in which Frazier strives to be historically correct and set a proper mood and tone.

"When you have hot and cold colors in the same bed, you feel tense and stressed, and you don't really know why," Frazier explains. "That same tension is totally absent here. It's a completely peaceful experience in every dimension."

Frazier is firm in his philosophy of hues. "We try not to use any hot colors in the summer. You won't see any red or orange, except where we want to highlight a central point," he says. "In the wintertime, it's just the opposite: bright and warm. We just trade off on the seasons."



Keeping a first-class appearance at Middleton Place requires an aggressive—yet fairly low-cost—maintenance program, Frazier is quick to point out.

Aggressive maintenance—Maintaining the right look requires aggressive maintenance. January, for example, starts with azalea planting, path repairs and mole treatments. In February, lawn care begins, along with regular plant pruning and rose replacement. Frazier also uses Casoron to control vine-like weeds in shrubbery and juniper beds then.

Garden maintenance in intensive, March into September. Spraying begins on the flowers and weeds. Any instances of azalea petal blight are treated with Bayleton.

March duties include trims to the bouquet wall, the rice mill hedge, pampasgrass and boxwood, and spraying camellias and azaleas. Spring also means controlling grubs and mole crickets in the turf and peach tree insects with Diazinon.

Roses are sprayed twice weekly for insects with Orthene starting in May, along with Daconil for Fungi. Camillias are pruned continuously. June work includes controlling scale, tea scale, white flies and mites on camellias and azaleas with Cygon.

July and August are particularly difficult months for lace bugs on the Azaleas. The azuyu worm, too, is a serious problem over the summer. Frazier finds Orthene the best remedy for rose pests such as beetles, earwigs, nematodes and spider mites.

Camellias and azaleas are sprayed again in November or February with an oil. At that point, the work starts to wind down. December and January are breaks from spraying.

Cutting labor—At one time, four people were needed to work three days a week just weeding walkways. On alternate weeks, those workers would spend three days pulling weeds from mulch beds. That has changed.

"By using Roundup, it takes only one person to do the same amount of work on the walkways and on the beds. Each area can be done in just one day," says Frazier. "That's 12 times less expense in labor required, plus I've made time for other workers to do different projects. You get more done with the presentations using Roundup."

No matter what the challenges, however, Frazier finds great reward in his work for Middleton Place. "We spend \$10,000 a year on pesticides—only a fraction of what a golf course would spend," he boasts.



Sidney Frazier (right) confers with Sara-Edi Livingston, who designed a nearby wildflower plot.