

ACCENT

FLORIDA HOME

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THE 100-ACRE WOOD:
Green Cay Nature Center,
a paradise in Boynton.
DETAILS INSIDE THE SCENE, 3D

SOAPS AXED: Sun sets on 'All My Children,' 'One Life to Live,' 5D

COUNTRY GOOD TIME
Dierks Bentley
plays Sunset Cove
Amphitheater tonight.

pbpulse.com

How Sathena Cabler has watched Florida GROW



**FLORIDA
GATOR DAYS
IN 1958:**
Sathena Cabler,
who received a
graduate degree
in biology from
the University
of Florida, holds
an alligator that
she and her
friends found
while doing field
research on
campus.

Family photos courtesy of Sathena Cabler



DAMON HIGGINS/Staff Photographer

Sathena Cabler is the head landscaper at Quail Ridge Country Club in Boynton Beach, where she has worked since the development began in 1973. Every year Cabler and her staff plant and tend to 72,000 flowers.



Sathena Cabler grew up in a small town in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. (Above at age 4 in her mom's garden in 1940.)

She answered the call of the outdoors at a young age – and has been keeping a little piece of Florida green for more than 38 years.

By EMILY J. MINOR
Special to The Palm Beach Post

There are a million and one things to love when the outdoors is your office, but Sathena Cabler most loves the rain. Buckets of rain, the unrepentant kind that comes and stays, for hours, rejuvenating all the petals and leaves and wilted blades of grass. "I certainly don't want the bad storms," she says. "But there's nothing quite like an overall wonderful rain." And there's nothing quite like Sathena Cabler.

See SATHENA, 8D ►

A FEW OF SATHENA'S FAVORITE FLORIDA FLOWERS, 8D

At Quail Ridge, they call her 'Mother Earth'

► SATHENA from 1D

For 38 years, since the Nixon presidency, this private woman with the soft voice, gentle spirit and green thumb has been keeping a little piece of Florida green. It all came about rather quickly, years ago, and began during very dismal times.

Cabler took over as head landscaper at a new Florida development after her beloved husband, John F. Cabler, a noted plant physiologist and golf course consultant, died in 1972 of Hodgkin's disease, the kind that could surely be cured today.

"I was 35, he was 36 and our little daughter was 5," she says.

But now ... On a recent morning at Quail Ridge Country Club, where Cabler has worked tending to the gardens since the development was new in 1973, she casts a tanned arm, no sunscreen for this gal, waving hello to a resident who is taking out the trash.

"Your tree looks beautiful," Cabler calls out, quietly explaining that they planted the purple-flowering Jacaranda as a living memorial when the woman's husband died many years ago.

"Usually she's gone and doesn't get to see it bloom," Cabler says. "I'm glad she's here this year."

When you grow the land — turn stubborn dirt and sand into dark shade and bright blossoms and green velvet — you do more than entertain the senses.

You nurture the people who stand upon it.

This, she knows.

Always outside in the garden

Cabler, 74, grew up in the small town of Bridgewater, Va., in the Shenandoah Valley, the daughter of a stay-home mother and a dad who sold Chevy car parts at the local dealership. She was a tomboy, always outside in her mother's garden.

She padded around in the cotton-pleated skirts and simple sleeveless shirts that her mother made. She wore penny loafers, which she still does, and kept her hair in pigtailed.

Their simple family life clicked along in tandem with the family garden, it seemed. Radishes and carrots. Peas and beans. Corn and cucumbers. "My mother would spend the summer canning for winter," she says.

In the spring, she'd wait for the lilies of the valley to push up through the snow, then the crocus and the daffodils and the tulips.

Her brothers — one older, one younger — were out and about, into sports, but Sathena always found intrigue on their small plot of land.

"I can just see myself in the garden, picking these flowers and taking them to school," she says.

When she was done with high school, Cabler stayed near home and earned a teaching degree from Bridgewater College. Women in those days stayed put, for the most part, working as secretaries or teachers or nurses.

Indeed, Cabler completed her student teaching and planned a career in the classroom.

But something was missing, and that something was the outdoors. Cabler got a job at Howard Johnson's and started stashing away the tip money so she could study biology in graduate school.

"I didn't know where I wanted to go, so I just applied everywhere," she says. "The school that gave me the best grant was the University of Florida."

And that's how Sathena Cabler became a Florida Gator.

In Gainesville, the small-town girl who had never seen a palm tree found a room at a beautiful old Florida house and unpacked her trunk. "I didn't even have a driver's license," she says. Instead of sorority

A FEW OF HER FAVORITE FLORIDA FLOWERS ...
Here are Sathena Cabler's top five plants for Florida.

- 1. PINWHEEL JASMINE**
'It's just such a peaceful plant. Dark green leaves, white blossoms.'
- 2. THRYALLIS**
'That's just a nice little shrub with delightful yellow blossoms, and it's very fragrant.'
- 3. JATROPHA**
'It gets a pretty red blossom and we can put it in tree form. Not a big tree, but a tree.'
- 4. HIBISCUS**
'It's just a good Florida plant and I enjoy it because of the different colors of flowers you can get.'
- 5. OLEANDER**
'I love their beautiful burst of color.'

And in the annual department:
 ■ Snapdragons
 ■ Blue salvia (pictured bottom row, left)
 ■ Impatiens

File photos

parties, she and her gang of biology students — all boys but her — spent hours exploring Florida.

"The best thing in the world was to turn over a rock and find a rattlesnake," she says.

Often, they'd start a campfire and cook their catch. "We were in college," she says. "We were poor."

But the tomboy from Virginia was about to get rich, in love.

Love for nature seals the deal

John F. Cabler was a brilliant

academic. He eventually earned his Ph.D. in plant physiology and biochemistry and did early research on the effects of chemical applications on plants. As a young man, he was prominently published. Professors considered him so promising he was allowed to skip his master's degree and move straight from the undergraduate to doctorate program.

Eventually, it was their love for nature that sealed the deal. But it was John Cabler's love for a quick round of golf that

initially brought them together. "He loved to golf and he'd cut class and he started borrowing my notes," she says.

One night, John Cabler suggested a cup of coffee to his classmate with the pretty name. (It's her grandmother's, by the way.) "I can still see the little place where we went," she says.

That was in January 1959.

They married that May.

"I can't tell you how many times we just went off to a little pond or a little field with some sandwiches, or sometimes we'd take a grill," she says. "We probably ate most of our meals out in the open."

The 1960s were idyllic for these newlyweds. The Cablers moved to South Florida, where they started a consulting business in Broward County. She did both office and field work. He became a sought-after golf course consultant — his chemical research key for Florida's booming golf industry. They had a daughter, Jacquelynn.

And then.

Well, we know what happened next.

When John Cabler died in 1972, they'd already moved to Palm Beach County and she was working on the landscaping team at the Delray Dunes development — where she still lives. John Dodge, the developer of a new community called Quail Ridge, had known both she and John quite well.

"He said, 'you're coming with me,'" she remembers.

And so, she did — designing the landscaping at Dodge's new development from scratch. Today, she runs a department of 75 people, but a 1977 gardening column made note of her position with this headline: "Woman Heads 14-Man Crew In Lawn Care."

In the simplest sense, headlines aside, staring back into time, plants saved her — just as she's always saving them.

"I'm always amazed with her," says Chip Misch, Quail Ridge's general manager.

"She'll speak to an individual tree or bush or plant bed in a very intimate manner.

"Around here, we call her Mother Earth."

And what else could you possibly call her?

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