

Native Plant Society of Texas
Big Bend Chapter
February 2008 Newsletter

Twofer's in February -

A February 1 **Arbor Day celebration** and a February 16 native plant propagation workshop with Patty Manning and Sul Ross Cactus Garden Tour with Linda Hedges will keep old man winter from your door for a bit. Details:

Our chapter of NPSOT and the Texas Forest Service will host a celebration of Arbor Day from 10 a.m. to noon on February 1 at the Sunshine House, 205 E. Sul Ross Avenue in Alpine.

A note from Arbor Day organizer Polly Melton - the celebration of Arbor Day was begun by J. Sterling Morton, editor of the first newspaper in Nebraska. Later, as Secretary of the Nebraska Territory, Morton proposed the first Arbor Day for April 10, 1872, and it is estimated that over a million trees were planted in Nebraska on that day. Since trees are best planted in the Trans-Pecos in the winter, we are celebrating now! And while we won't plant a million trees, we will plant four.

Texas Forest Service Urban Forester Oscar Mestas will present a short workshop on the benefits of trees, including how to select the right tree for the right place and how to properly plant a tree. This is a great time to ask him questions about your trees.

After the program, the trees will get planted. Please plan to be there! And you are invited to stay for the Sunshine House tasty lunch, available for a small donation.

If you'd like to donate a tree - or make a monetary contribution to this project - contact Polly Melton at 432-386-0967.

THEN - Feb. 16 in the greenhouses at Sul Ross, **Patty Manning and Linda Hedges** will do a tag team on **native plant propagation**: We'll split the group in two and Patty will teach the propagation portion of the program in the greenhouse while Linda does an **interpreted tour of the SR Cactus Garden** - more preparation for the March Cactus Propagation workshop with Marc Goff at CDRI.

Halfway through, groups will switch so everyone gets both the class and the tour!

Reservations are necessary for the Feb. 16 program and the sign up sheet will be at One Way Plant Nursery starting Feb. 4. Call them at 837-1117 to reserve a spot.

Speaking of Trees -

A beautiful tree for our area - the Lacey oak (*Quercus laceyi* /*Q. glaucooides*) was named after a rancher named Howard Lacey.

Endemic to the Texas Hill Country and growing to a height of only 25-30 feet, this small oak is much more suitable for tight urban landscapes than many larger species. The blue-tinged leaves are thick and somewhat leathery, rarely affected by disease or insects, and the bark is platy and gray, making the term "smoky" appropriate for describing the overall appearance.

The tree eventually forms an interesting "crinkled globe" crown, which easily sets it apart from most other trees in the neighborhood. It generally produces a pretty healthy crop of acorns, much to the delight of the local wildlife. All of these attributes make it a perfect choice for resource-wise gardens, native plant gardens, wildscape gardens, and most "regular" gardens. One word of caution: it does not like wet feet, so make sure you plant it in adequately drained sites.

(Reprinted from the Neil Sperry e-Newsletter, December 2007. Author: Steven Chamblee)

Gardening for Pollinators -

This spring, a number of professional beekeepers across the country opened their hives to find well-built combs dripping with honey - but no bees. A mysterious syndrome called Colony Collapse Disorder affected many hives of honeybees in 35 states and caused some beekeepers to lose as much as 80 percent of their hives.

Even before Colony Collapse Disorder threatened U.S. hives, however, the number of commercially managed honeybee hives here was nearly one-third of what it had been in the 1940s, according to the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign. Honeybees are not native to this continent, but they are vital in pollinating our food crops, particularly fruits and vegetables, which are also primarily non-native.

While the exact causes of the honeybee's fall off are not certain, this spring, the National Academies of Science report "Status of Pollinators in North America" focused on introduced parasites that weaken or kill their honeybee hosts as a key component of their decline. That report also noted that wild pollinators, such as native bees, could fill in for honeybees as crop pollinators when honeybee populations decline.

According to Stephen Buchmann, international coordinator for the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign and one of the authors of the pollinator report, there are fewer than 4,000 species of native ground-and twig-nesting bees on this continent. These native bees not only can pollinate many of the same food crops as honeybees, but they are the only bees that can pollinate some food plants such as blueberries, cranberries, eggplant and tomatoes because of their ability to buzz-pollinate.

"The problem is that right now everyone is focusing on honeybees, but we are losing our native pollinators as well," he said. The experts agree that native plants are vital to the conservation of wild bees.

A native wildflower garden just needs to be tweaked to make it better for pollinator insects, says Matthew Shepherd, pollinator conservation program director for the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation in Portland, Oregon.

Keeping your garden free of pesticides is important, he says, as is providing nesting areas for pollinator insects. That means providing at least a patch of bare ground in mulched gardens for ground-nesting native bees. Standing dead trees and even dead branches provide nest sites for the twig-nesting bees. Alternately, you can create nests for these bees by drilling holes into wood blocks, he says.

By helping conserve native bee populations that provide services like pollination, native plants play a role in ensuring future generations of flowering plants and fruits. For more information, visit these Web sites: www.nappc.org and www.pollinator.org

(Reprinted from the Winter 2007 edition of Wildflower, the magazine of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Author: Madeline Bodin)

Xeriscape in Albuquerque -

The Xeriscape Council of New Mexico holds its 13th Water Conservation and Xeriscape Conference in Albuquerque Feb. 21 and 22 with an all-star line up of experts on xeriscape, water, landscaping, etc. This is usually attended by professionals, but anyone can attend and learn. So to find out more about the event, the council or to register, log on to <http://www.xeriscapenm.com/>

Critter Proofing Your Garden -

For many of us, this has been a challenging fall and winter gardening season - since September we have had regular (incessant) visits from deer in the heart of Alpine in addition to the odd javelina herd and sleepy skunks.

I'm hoping the resulting (tasteful) deer fence will help me sleep at night, but NPSOT member Mary Fenton shares an e-mail from her friend Dr. James Lake, a psychiatrist in northern California, who has turned critter proofing into a life work:

"Not sure you would believe me if I told you the length we've had to go to in order to grow fruit trees and a vegetable garden here. Here are the "layers" around our garden:

1. 6 foot cyclone fence with gate
2. Plastic meshwork (about 1cm) all around fence (it is a rectangle about 15 x 20 ft) including the gate. The mesh is on the inside and outside of the fence.

3. Weedgard (synthetic woven cloth) outside the perimeter (about 3 ft wide) and going up to and attached to the bottom of the 2x4s at base of fence, and also inside the garden. It is the ground cover for a 3 ft wide path inside the fenced off area that surrounds a raised bed.
4. The raised bed is elevated to about 1 foot from ground level.
5. There are three layers of chicken wire (laid out perpendicular fashion) under the earth in the raised bed and going up the inside surfaces of the 1 foot raised bed.
6. Almost forgot to mention that from there are also three green-colored plastic-coated wires in parallel rows above the top of the fence going around the rectangle. These are spaced about 10 inches apart. Although there is no current a friend suggested that I try this so that the deer "would think" there is current and not jump the fence!"

Here you have the "master plan!" It took weeks to put this together and my wife had a great time laughing at my obsessional behavior with this project. However, I am almost the only person in our area who has managed to successfully grow an organic garden to maturity every year...everyone else I've talked with about gardening gave up a long time ago because of the "critter problem" around here, and so all this effort has paid off.

Forgot to mention that we sometime use one of those vibrating devices that are supposed to keep away gophers with high frequency sound pulses. Not sure this works. Also use a foul-smelling liquid called "liquid fence" that is supposed to simulate coyote urine. This is allegedly a deterrent to deer. We also sometimes use "holographic tape" tied to the fruit trees which is supposed to scare off birds, also sometimes use netting around the buckthorn planted along the boundary of the property (keeps them from chewing off young leaves in the spring). All the fruit trees were planted in chicken-wire "baskets" and I put cyclone fencing around them supported by poles. Finally, and I'm sure this is the most effective "deterrent," there is a very mean and strange looking scare-crow in the garden, and our dog run is only about 10 feet from the garden...we have two huskies who are in charge of monitoring the quail and cat population during the day!"

Rare Plants of Texas -

A beautiful, full color guide to the rare plants of Texas has just been published by Texas A&M Press. Our friend Jackie Poole is first among four authors of this complete look at the state's rare plants, described by Mike Powell as the best book out there! Many line drawings and color photos; it's a "must have" and Front Street Books can help - they are fully stocked and are offering NPSOT members a 10% discount.

Becoming Part of the Mexican Wolf Story -

The web of life that native plants support includes fauna large and small. This story was sent to us by Rick LoBello with the El Paso Zoo with a request "Please help save the Mexican wolf by forwarding this message to others. In Memory of the Last Mexican Wolf."

Most of you know that at the El Paso Zoo where I work we have three Mexican wolves and are trying to help save this critically endangered species in many ways, including supporting the ongoing reintroduction program in the Southwest. Please go on the Internet by starting with the El Paso Zoo website at www.elpasozoo.org where you can learn more and get involved. Start with the page we have for the Mexican wolf in the Animals section of Americas. On our site we have a number of important links plus video interviews with members of the Mexican Wolf Recovery Team.

Yet more!

February 16 meeting -

Please bring tall stools to the greenhouse portion of the program so you don't have to stand the entire hour. The tables in the greenhouse are tall, so chairs won't help.

Alas, Patty will not be selling plants as we announced in the program brochure - the crush of the beginning of the semester has not allowed her time to prepare. But she is growing plants for the CDRI April 25 and 26 plant sale. So mark you calendars for that!

Rare Plants of Texas, Jackie Pool's new book (along with other authors) will be available after the meeting, however. Staff from Front Street Books will be there with this beautiful book. It's \$35. with a 10% discount for NPSOT members.

From Jim Martinez, our January presenter -

During our January garden tour, Jim was kind enough to offer to give our members the sources he uses for plants, seeds, gravel and fencing materials.

"Forgot to mention that the inspiration for the work is this incredible world we live in. Grasses are planted more formally than in nature, but the spacing of the plants is very much like the pattern and spacing that occurs in the desert environment.

Good sources that I use:

***One Way Nursery-Alpine**

Alice Stevens knows all of the growers and more if you are looking for some hard to find plants. She can find it if it is being grown in the region.

***Good Seed Sources:**

Native American Seed www.seedsource.com Junction TX

Wildseed Farms www.wildseedfarms.com Fredericksburg TX

Native Texas Nursery 512-276-9801 Austin, TX Wholesale Grower (order through Alice)

Enchanted Gardens www.nmenchantedgardens.com Las Cruces, NM

Sierra Vista Growers 505-874-2415 La Union NM

Pawnee Butte Seed Company www.pawneebutteseed.com Colorado. Good seed source for grass seed and wild flower mixes for our elevation. I have had a great deal of success with their seeds.

***Mulch and compost.**

I have had good luck with Back To Earth Composted Cotton Seed Burr from N TX. I use it as mulch and fertilizer for desert plants. Has been labeled as organic, but have not tested it for residuals. (Available from Alice)

***Gravel:**

I prefer local sources that reflect the local natural environment. For gravel type and source: Capitol Aggregate/Trsans-Pecos Materials, Hoban plant, Hwy 17 Pecos. 432-447-9667 Hoban is local crushed gravel in various grades (sizes). The color reads as very neutral in the landscape and reflects the Rhyolitic materials of the areas around the Alpine, Ft Davis and Marfa. - Highland Sand and gravel in Alpine

For large amounts use local haulers such as Skelton Trucking. They have a yard in Alpine and can haul 10 to 18 cubic yard loads.

***Fencing Materials:**

Can be expensive so my preference is to use Cattle Fencing Panels with galvanized posts and plant a green wall. The CMU (cement) Block wall is expensive but is a one time cost and a good investment if well built. Wood and Wattle require a bit more maintenance to sustain over time."

Blue Water Natural Foods -

Opening in Alpine in February. A natural food warehouse in the old bowling alley on 118 south of town. Here's the link to their Web site. Order a catalogue. Read all about it! Pass the info on!

<http://www.bluewaternf.com/>

Bringing National Parks to the attention of presidential candidates -

We are lucky to live within a relatively short distance of two outstanding parks, so we have a personal investment in their well-being.

The National Parks Conservation Association is working to bring the plight of the parks to the attention of all candidates running for president. They are gathering signatures on a petition to send to all the candidates and invite all those who are interested to sign it.

Their campaign is a little "cute," but the intention is serious and important. To add your name to the petition, go to <http://www.electteddy.org:80/>

La Entrada Meeting -

If you're concerned about the impact of

La Entrada al Pacifico

Attend the:

TxDot La Entrada Feasibility Study Team

Public Meeting

February 19, 2008

Espino Conference Room, SRSU, Alpine

6:00 P.M. - Open House / 7:00 P.M. - Presentation

Comments & Questions

Will be accepted after the Presentation.

A BIG Turnout Sends a Strong Message

Show you Care by Showing Up!