

Trinity Forks Native Plant Press

The Newsletter of the Trinity Forks Chapter,
Native Plant Society of Texas

February 2006

From the Prez...

From the ground, up!

Trinity Forks is off to a great start in the new year. Of course, beginning the year with the title of “**2005 Chapter of the Year**” can’t be a bad start. Congratulations again to all who worked so hard to earn this honor.

This is an exciting and challenging time for the Trinity Forks Chapter. We are fortunate to have FIVE new board members: **Steve Spurger** (Education), **Joan Phelps** (Newsletter editor), **Marilyn Blanton** and **Kathy Saucier** (NICE! Co-coordinators), and **Smiddy Foreman** (Programs); also, **Irene Hanson** (Publicity) has taken on the added role of Webmaster. Please take a moment to thank these members for their service. Our chapter is greatly enriched by their support. And contact me if **YOU** would like to provide additional assistance, or just sit in on the next board meeting (held on the 1st Thursday at 7:30 p.m.—visitors are always welcome).

Many thanks to **Howard Garrett**, who recently presented our January program about soil. It was a great introduction for our program theme this year, *From the ground, up!* In the coming months, we will look at plants from how the roots contact soil and moisture, to stems and leaves and fruits. Each part of our native plants is uniquely adapted to our climate and we hope to take a close look at some of those features of our local flora.

This year, your board hopes to build on our past with a new outreach effort, the NICE! program (*Natives Instead of Common Exotics!*). We will be building this program “*from the ground, up!*” and I want to encourage each and every one of you to get involved. In order to help everyone be informed, **Betty Dunn**, an experienced NICE! person from the Boerne chapter where this idea originated, will visit us for our February meeting. We need your participation in order to make this

idea succeed here in North Texas, so be prepared to “*say yes!*” to NICE!

Time in 2006 is already rushing by us all, I’m sure. Recently I took advantage of our warm weather to work in my garden for a bit. I was amazed at the abundance of life showing everywhere! Many evergreen rosettes were showing in far greater numbers than I expected due to the drought we are experiencing. There are dozens of **Fall asters** (*Aster* spp.), **Lyre leaf sages** (*Salvia lyrata*), **Gulf-coast penstemon** (*Penstemon tenuis*), **Phlox** (*Phlox* sp.), and **Columbines** (*Aquilegia longissima* and *A. canadensis*); and quite a few **Common goldenrod** (*Solidago canadensis*), **Foxglove** (*Penstemon cobaea*), **Horseherb** (*Calypocarpus vialis*), **Spiderwort** (*Tradescantia* spp.), and **Golden groundsel** (*Senecio obovatus*). And, oh yes—one evergreen and everblooming **Englemann daisy** (*Englemannia peristenia*)—this has been the most amazing plant! My **Autumn sages** (*Salvia greggii*) are always blooming at least a little and the berries on my **Possumhaw holly** (*Ilex decidua*) are ripe and ready for the mockingbirds. Altogether, it was a most satisfying morning! My hope is that you, too, will have time and space to “*Grow Native!*” in 2006.

Cynthia Maguire, President ☞



Our February Program

Our February speaker will be **Betty Dunn**, a member of the Boerne Chapter of NPSOT. Betty is a Past-President of the Boerne Chapter, was a Board Member during the inception of the *Natives Instead of Common Exotics!* (NICE!) program, and has been on the NICE! planning committee since it began. Boerne won *Chapter of the Year* in 2002 for their creation of this program because it so well embodies our mission statement. Her purpose in coming is to explain how NICE! works and how to use the program to spread the word to grow native. We welcome her and look forward to an educational evening!



Trinity Forks: 2005 NPSOT Chapter of the Year!

As some of you know, each chapter in the state sends a summary of its activities to the NPSOT president in September to be used in selecting the organization's Chapter-of-the-Year. The award is announced at the Fall Symposium. The disadvantage to this is that our fiscal year, along with our slate of officers, runs from January through December. Thus, we still have four more months of activities evolving.

As we frantically prepared the original 'one-page-wonder' document for state competition in 2005, it became apparent that our chapter does more than can be squeezed onto one page. Therefore, I volunteered to revamp the material at hand, incorporate the end-of-year activities, and provide us with a document that can be used for a handout in 2006.

I re-structured the report format to complement our Mission Statement, categorizing our activities via Education, Outreach, and Example. **Mike Mizell** helped me detail our fieldtrips by date, location, subject, and leader. Our programs are now listed per month by date, subject, speaker, and credentials. Both categories provide quick references. My thanks also goes to **Owen Yost** who assisted me with Outreach, to **Shirley Lusk** regarding activities in Cooke and Montague counties, to **Kathy Saucier** who reminded me of her specific garden plant lists, to **Cathy Lustgarten** for her condensed Ways & Means report, to **Steve Spurger** for additional information about his personal, hands-on garden plots in the community, and to **Cynthia Maguire** and **Lon Turnbull** for their comments. And, I extend a big thanks to **Caroline Polliard** for her time and talent in helping me edit.

Hopefully, this longer and more inclusive revised Chapter Report 2005 will be sent to each 2006 Trinity Forks speaker prior to their scheduled program, given to each visitor who attends our meetings, added to our and the state websites and historical scrapbook, plus be available at every plant sale and promotional booth throughout the year. We will also share it with the local Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Denton Garden Council, Organic Society and Keep Denton Beautiful organizations, plus the Denton County Extension office.

We have an incredible chapter of very talented members, and our accomplishments in following our Mission Statement are overwhelming. Pick up a copy of this hand-out at the next meeting; you will be reassured that we can display the Chapter-of-the-Year award quilt with pride!

Dorothy Thetford, 2005 Education Chair ☞

Native Plant Sale Saturday, April 8

Warm temperatures, a little rain—you know that means plants are breaking dormancy and seeds are ready to germinate—just in time for our annual sale! Start checking your property now for **plants that are native** to our part of Texas that could be divided, thinned or transplanted into pots for our sale. Collect seeds to sell, or start growing them now. Here's your chance to put into action what you learned from **Becca Dickstein** last October. If you need some help to dig large quantities of plants, let **Irene Hanson** know [972-539-9471 or ICHanson@metlspan.com] so we can organize a digging party. She has already organized a dig in St. Jo for Feb. 4 or Feb. 11, so contact her if that sounds like your kind of party!

Watch the March newsletter for more plant sale details. Your plants, energy, ideas and talents are what make this happen. There are opportunities for enthusiasts of all ages and experience levels, from novice to expert. Without you, we are nothing. Working together, we are awesome!!

Cathy Lustgarten, Vice President ☞
972/306-1088 drgoodrad@comcast.net



Membership News

We welcome these new members of Trinity Forks Chapter who have joined since October 1, 2005.

Lucianne Blakemore • **Diana Casas** • **Richard Jones** • **Marian McCarley** • **Patrick Peterson** • **Joan E. Phelps** • **Patricia & W. S. Pierce** • **Janice Randel** • **Mike E. Reynolds** • **Duane & Joyce Smith** • **Jeremy Voss**

Member renewals in the same time period have been received for:

Sharen Arnold • **Elizabeth L. Bailey** • **Sylvia Bayer** • **Lisa Bellows** • **Claude Walter** • **Marilyn & Jim Blanton** • **Diana Block & Dan Mauldin** • **Edward L. Ellis** • **Joanne Fellows** • **Irene Hanson** • **Laurie J. Hammett** • **Elinor & Robert Hughes** • **Pete Kamp** • **Louis & Louise Kraft** • **Linda Krimm** • **Norma Lopez** • **Stanley Lovelace** • **Cynthia Maguire** • **Kathleen G. Scott** • **Don & Nelia Smith** • **Jim Smith**

Laurie Hammett, Membership ☞

My Old Mexican Plum

From my kitchen window, I see the birds coming and going from the **Mexican plum** tree (*Prunus mexicana*). The old tree grows just beyond the bottom step at the end of the walk from the back porch into the yard. It's been declining in recent years with fewer and fewer blooms, leaves and fruit. A storm several years ago split its trunk leaving it only half of its former self, but it's still a favorite tree with me and the birds.

There are many reasons for it to be a favorite, but its status now as the center of attention and activity is due to the six bird feeders hanging from its branches. I keep the binoculars close at hand and have a good view from every window across the back of the house.

My Mexican plum is a small tree compared to the **sycamores, ashes, elms, hackberries, bois d'arcs** and other trees in my back yard.

Mexican plums grow to twenty five feet in height with an irregular crown and are often understory trees. They are sometimes called big tree plums because they grow as scattered trees that do not form thickets.

Bright flashes of red from northern cardinals and varied shades of blue from blue jays stand out against the rough, dark grayish-black bark of the leafless Mexican plum. Carolina wrens, tufted titmice, Carolina chickadees and sparrows blend in among the stout twigs, but their quick movements catch my eye. Woodpeckers, downy and red bellied, both with black and white markings and touches of red, go from pecking on the tree to stealing peanuts from the feeder.

The Mexican plum has rough, scaly, deep furrowed bark. It will remain bare until it blooms in early spring with showy, fragrant clusters of five petaled white flowers up to one inch across. The Mexican plum blooms at the same time as redbuds. Woods sprinkled with white plum and pinkish-purple redbud blossoms makes a lovely sight and attracts bees and butterflies.

New spring leaves emerge as the delicate flowers fade and drop their petals showering the

ground beneath with white. The leaves are simple and alternate with single or double serrated teeth and prominent veins. They grow to four inches long and two inches wide and are slightly thick and droopy. In autumn the leaves turn a dull yellow. The glimpses of yellow I see now are goldfinches.

In late summer, small, dark reddish-purple plums with a whitish surface bloom ripen. The juicy one inch fruit contains a single seed and may not drop until September. The plums are eaten by songbirds and small mammals.

Although the plums are not very good to eat fresh, they do make excellent jelly. Some of the plums that are not foraged and carried away produce seedlings under the tree in the spring. I've saved several in pots to use as replacement trees. The ground under my tree now is foraged by mourning doves, dark-eyed juncos, squirrels, and an occasional brown thrasher scavenging seeds spilled from the feeders.

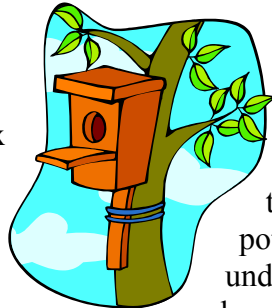
Mexican plums are wonderful, attractive trees that are being used more in landscapes as they become increasingly available in nurseries. Mexican plums are also used as grafting stock. They are easy to grow in most soil types, drought tolerant and native to the eastern two thirds of the state.

I know a spring will come when my old Mexican plum no longer blooms, leafs out or bears fruit but until then, I'll continue to enjoy it through the seasons. Now the distraction of watching the birds in the tree makes my progress cleaning the kitchen go slowly, but what's more important, clean coffee cups or watching a red-breasted nuthatch?

Marilyn Blanton ☪

January Meeting was a Winner!!

What a grand turnout there was to hear *The Dirt Doctor*, **Howard Garrett**, at our January 26 meeting. There were 106 people in attendance, one of the best attended programs we have ever had! In addition to NPSOT members, the Denton Organic Society, Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners and the community in general were well represented.



Digging into our Roots



Betty Jane Dodds, Decatur's Tour de Force

Betty Jane Dodds has been a member of the **Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT)** from its inception. In autumn 1980, several individuals who shared a common interest in native plants and wildflowers laid the foundation for what would become the Native Plant Society of Texas. She attended the organizational meeting in April 1981 and became a charter member. The Native Plant Society of Texas was divided into seven regions and Miss Dodds served as secretary for the North Texas Region for seven years. She remains a member of Trinity Forks Chapter although she no longer drives at night. Miss Dodds attended statewide meetings for eight years, serving as the first state secretary in 1981 and secretary/treasurer from 1982. When Miss Dodds retired from her job as secretary/treasurer in October 1989, she was presented with an original, handcrafted silver bluebonnet pin and an **Honorary Life Membership** in the state organization. At the time, **Dr. Mary Evelyn Blagg-Huey**, President of Texas Woman's University, and **Lady Bird Johnson** were the only other Honorary Life Members.

In 1996 Miss Dodds was presented the **NPSOT Fellows Award**, which is given for service and work by a NPSOT member for the enrichment of the Society at the state, regional, or chapter level.

Wildflower photography was her hobby while her vocation was teaching business in the Muenster Independent School District. "People often saw me park my car by the side of a country road and get down on my knees in the bar ditches to take a photograph of some wildflower," she wrote to this historian.

Miss Dodds worked with the **Decatur Heritage Wildscape Society** to establish "Pioneer Prairie Park". This park has a log house, wagon and native plant gardens as well as prairie grasses and trails. She has continued her involvement in the Chapter by working in the Trinity Forks Chapter booth at the first **Decatur Heritage Festival** in April 2005.

Harriet Horton, Historian ☞

Now is the time to pot up those North Texas Natives for our Annual Fundraiser & Spring Plant Sale - April 8. See plant list on our website at <http://www.npsot.org/TrinityForks/TrinityForksWeb/plants.html>

Dirt-y Secrets Revealed

Dallas' own, **Howard Garrett**, The Dirt Doctor, kicked off our 2006 Lecture Series "From the Ground, Up." He is a landscape architect by training and has committed his entire career to the research, education and promotion of organic landscaping, gardening, farming, ranching and basic soil management. Garrett stated that when starting a new garden, there is no need to change the soil as all soils can be turned into better soil. Native plants tend to tolerate poorer soils, and trees much more so, due to their more extensive root systems.

How does one get life into the soil? He suggested the following amendments can be added to the soil: earthworm castings, cotton burr compost, lava sand, wheat bran, and dry molasses. If organic additives are used as recommended, there will be no damage done to the biology or the physics of the soil. Indeed the soil ought to improve the quality of those plants that are desired.

Garrett also presented many ways of gardening that can lead to problems. Many composts produce very inconsistent results as they often are not thoroughly composted and the material used to form the compost are often unknown and not the same for each batch. Much of the interaction between life in the soil takes place at the surface, so do not use plastic ground sheets to prevent weeds from growing (from his experience they just don't work.) He noted the best choice for herbicide use is 10% white vinegar made from grain alcohol. It should be used full strength along with some orange oil and liquid soap. His recipe is on his website www.dirtdoctor.com.

Garrett gave an excellent presentation on how to plant trees and how to restore trees that had been planted too deeply. It is important that the root flare (where the trunk meets the roots), remains out of the soil. Otherwise the tree grows slower and is more likely to be stressed and so have less resistance to disease. When the root flare is underground, it stays moist and doesn't breathe properly as bark is supposed to do. The soil too high on the trunk also often hides circling and girdling roots which choke the tree and drastically slow down growth. He cautioned that trees grown in containers are highly subject to this damaging condition.

We have been using organic methods since we moved into our house 6 years ago and we have a beautiful back yard. We are on ¼ acre, and last spring we counted about 60 different kinds of flowers -- an excellent tribute to organic gardening.

Rebecca Dickstein and Lon Turnbull ☞

CALENDAR

Thursday, February 23, 6:30 p.m. ☞ TRINITY FORKS CHAPTER MEETING at Texas Woman's University in the ACT Building. At 6:30, see Display Tables and enjoy refreshments in the second floor lobby; program begins at 7:00 p.m. in Room 301. Our featured speaker is **Betty Dunn** from the Boerne Chapter who will present the benefits of Natives *Instead of Common Exotics!* (NICE!) program to publicize growing native. ☞

Sat, February 25, all day. ☞ Native Plants as Habitat, the SPRING JOINT SYMPOSIUM sponsored by NPSOT and Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, will be at the Wildflower Center in Austin, TX. Visit www.npsot.org or call (512) 292-4100 for details. ☞

Sun, Feb 26, 12:30-5:30 p.m. ☞ Trout Lily Walk at Cedar Ridge Preserve in SW Dallas. Also, possibly see wild orchids. Leader: **Jim Varnum**. Leave Denton @ 12:45 sharp from Luby's Cafeteria (meet out next to the I-35 service road.) Return around 5:30 p.m. ☞

Thursday, March 23, 6:30 p.m. ☞ TRINITY FORKS CHAPTER MEETING at Texas Woman's University in the ACT Building. At 6:30, see Display Tables and enjoy refreshments in the second floor lobby; program begins at 7:00 p.m. in Room 301. Our featured speaker will be **Dr. Ken Dickson** from the University of North Texas addressing *Water needs of Texas Native Plants*. ☞

Sat, Mar. 25, all day ☞ Visit **BRIT** (Botanical Research Institute of Texas) in Ft. Worth to see their magnificent herbarium collection and library of valuable botanical books. (This is a fascinating place!) Eat lunch in FW then proceed to Weatherford to see the Texas champion (and perhaps national champion) Pecan tree, estimated to be 500-1000 years old. Howard Garrett has been advising the owners on the care of this superb tree for several years. Leave Denton at 9:00 a.m. from the Ben E. Keith Beer Distributorship on I-35 just south of Oak/Hickory Street. Return about 4 p.m. ☞

Fri., Mar. 31, 1:00 p.m. ☞ Recycling Facility Tour. The waste recycling facility operated by Trinity (now Allied) Waste Mgt. Services (the company that handles recycled waste collection for Denton and many other area cities). Leave Denton @ 1:00 p.m. from Holiday Lanes Bowling Alley on Hwy. 380 (Univ. Dr.) at Ruddell St. ☞

Sat., Apr. 29, 8:30 a.m. ☞ Tour Lake Lewisville Environmental Learning Area (LLELA) in Lewisville led by **Dr. Ken Steigman**. See prairie restoration area and bison project, as well as a huge variety of native

vegetation. Next, tour the adjoining **Lewisville ISD Outdoor Learning Area (LISDOLA)** led by **Steve Spurger**. If you wish, participate in the annual plant trade that morning at LISDOLA (see our website for details). Bring binoculars for birdwatching and \$3 for entrance to LLELA. Leave Denton at 8:30 a.m. from Luby's Cafeteria. Return around 1 p.m. If you wish to bring a picnic lunch, there are tables where you can enjoy the outdoors. ☞

Sat. May 7, 10:00 a.m. ☞ A guided tour of Wilma Haggard's property in southeast Denton at 1900 S. Mayhill Rd. next to the Denton landfill. She has several acres of wonderful wildflowers. ☞

THE TRINITY FORKS CHAPTER MEETS THE 4TH THURSDAY OF JAN-MAY AND SEPT-OCT AT 6:30 P.M. IN THE ADMINISTRATION AND CLOCK TOWER (ACT) BUILDING AT TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY (OAKLAND AVE & ADMIN. DR.) IN DENTON, TEXAS.

Current Officers/Board Members

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Kathy Saucier	972.492.4680 <i>gsaucier@svbell.net</i>
Publicity/Webmaster	972.539.9471
Irene Hanson	<i>ICHanson@metlspan.com</i>

Join the Native Plant Society of Texas—Trinity Forks Chapter. If you wish to join (or renew) indicate your category of membership, then clip and mail this application with the appropriate remittance to:
NPSOT, P.O. Box 3017, Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

Name: _____ () Individual \$20 () Benefactor \$100 () Family \$25
 Address: _____ () Group \$35 () Senior \$15 () Patron \$50
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip _____ () Corporation \$1000 () Student \$15
 Phone: _____ Email: _____

The purpose of the Native Plant Society of Texas is to promote the conservation, research and utilization of the native plants and plant habitats of Texas, through education, outreach and example

Get free native plants the natural way

Nature has done it this way throughout the ages. I'm talking about tree cavities (often enlarged by birds) which are the natural, preferred homes of many of north Texas' birds. These same birds, in various ways, distribute the seeds of native plants, often fertilizing them too.

Birds have a preference for native plants. They seek protective cover in them, they've learned when native plants produce things to eat, how to make nests from them, etc. They've learned this throughout many, many generations – passing this knowledge of native plants along to their offspring. So when they see a plant whose ancestry is Italian, Japanese, Californian or something else, they're confused and may move on to another yard.

Over the centuries, they've spread the seeds of **Pecan** (*Carya illinoensis*), **Plum** (*Prunus* sp.), **Lantana** (*Lantana horrida*), **Agarita** (*Berberis trifoliolata*), **Redbud** (*Cercis Canadensis*), **Coralberry** (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*), **Frogfruit** (*Phyla nodiflora*), countless native grasses, and any other native plant you care to name. Largely, they're "planted" near a cavity in an old tree that's become a nest or roost.

Cavity-nesting birds in this area include Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, Bluebirds, Swallows and several kinds of woodpeckers. Many other species nest in old or dead trees, and feed on the insects they attract. On the ground beneath the nest you'll see all sorts of native plants sprouting among the inch-tall sunflowers. If there's no tree, a loosely-stacked brush pile will do nicely and can attract other birds as well.

So, unless a tree is in danger of falling on your house or a passerby, consider leaving it right where it is. Let it die of old age gracefully; maybe planting a vine on it. You'll have all sorts of interesting native plants growing beneath it.

G. Owen Yost ☞

Native Plant Society of Texas
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