



Trinity Forks Native Plant Press

The Newsletter of Trinity Forks Chapter
Native Plant Society of Texas

January 2008

From the Prez (Cathy Lustgarten)

Be it resolved:

What say this year we resurrect the “Educational Minute” at the beginning of each chapter meeting? And how about we do it as a “Show & Tell” or “Tips & Pointers” format for YOU to share with your NPSOT friends? Did YOU once find an intriguing plant in your yard, wait patiently to see what it turned into, only to have it take over your entire landscape like the Little Shop of Horrors? Can you bring a picture to caution the rest of us? Is there a nifty native that you’ve added to your landscape and YOU want to tell your friends all about it? Did YOU discover a cool plant in the wild worthy of our attention? Or stumble onto an awesome way of grouping some natives in YOUR garden that would stop Ferdinand Lindheimer in his tracks? Know of a great new place for native plant peeping? A hot tip on landscaping? C’mon -- show & tell the rest of us!

Just let me know if you’ve got a 1-minute tip to share, and I will put YOU on the schedule. Let’s try to have one for each meeting this year. I’ll get the ball rolling and give the tip for the January meeting. The rest of the year IS UP TO YOU. What? You say your pictures always turn out crummy? We’ll solve that problem for you with this month’s program (see next column).

In fact, we will be calling on many of our own talented members (that describes most of you!) to give our programs & lead our field trips this year. Be sure to let me know if you have an idea for a program or a trip. Or if you are feeling even more ambitious, here is a list of open positions for 2008, just waiting for you to volunteer to serve the chapter:

Vice President
Ways & Means (plant sale) Chair
Field Trip Chair
Program Chair
Education Chair

Groundcover News

Wilma Haggard is sharing some of her wonderful wildflower resources with the community. She has been working with staff from Denton’s Utilities & Solid Waste Department to spread roadside wildflower seeds near their site on Mayhill Road, including many seeds she collected from her own property. In March we will be digging plants at her property for our spring sale.

January Program - Thursday, Jan. 24

“Photography for the Average Nature Lover”
by Kathy Saucier

If you love to take photos of our wonderful native plants, a point and shoot camera is all you need. This non-technical program will give you some tips to improve your photos of our wildflowers and the critters around them. This program should be of interest to teachers as well as hobbyists.

Topics discussed will include composition, background, light, close-ups and flash. The talk will include lots of photos taken by Kathy over the last 12 months with her Canon digital camera (nothing big and fancy and still applicable to 35 mm as well), many comparing good and bad examples.

Kathy is a serious amateur photographer, having taken over 400 rolls of film in her adult life and now dabbling with digital for the last year. She has won several local contests, but is best known as three-time winner of the Charlene Barnard Memorial Award presented by the Amarillo Chapter at NPSOT’s annual symposium. And, those years that she didn’t take first place, she took second place.

So for those who are interested in entering this contest, she will also discuss some of the points that the judges are looking for.

Sad News

Kate Hillhouse, state NPSOT president, 1992-3, and grand dame of wildflowers in East Texas, passed away January 3. She exuded energy and charm. A wonderful tribute to Kate can be found in the July/August 2004 state newsletter.

Trinity Forks Chapter of NPSOT meets on the fourth Thursday of January through May and September and October. Sign-in, social time with refreshments, educational displays, etc. start at 6:30 on the 2nd floor of the Administration & Clock Tower (ACT) building at Texas Woman’s University in Denton. ACT is located at Oakland Ave. & Administration Drive. The program begins at 7:00 pm on the 3^d floor.

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.

PRECISELY WHAT IS A “NATIVE PLANT”?

by Owen Yost

All NPSOT members, and almost all garden designers and writers (including me) strongly advocate the use of “native” plants. But what is a native plant? Exactly what do those words mean?

Like you, I’ve been asked that question several times. I’m sure that each time I’ve given a slightly different answer. I suppose that’s OK, because no clear answer exists. Even the NPSOT headquarters is stumped.

The United States Dept. of Agriculture created a bureaucrat-induced definition: “A plant species that occurs naturally in a particular region, ecosystem and habitat without direct or indirect human actions.” Of course, aside from the impropriety of using an undefined term in the definition of the same term, a whole lot of new questions are raised.

Most landscape professionals informally think of a native plant as one that was growing here prior to 1492, when Columbus “discovered” America. But what about DeLeon’s landing in 1513. His influence (and Cortez’s) was felt in America well before Columbus’. What about Leif Ericson (*or Leiv Eiriksson to his friends*)? And what about the native Americans? We could even go back to the land bridge across the Bering Strait.

I personally substitute “European influence” for any reference to Columbus. But it’s really not that important how one parses words, just so a plant has been growing here for a long, long time.

Some people inject the criterion that the plant has “evolved naturally” for it to be a true native plant. I’m certainly not a botanist, but this seems to exclude manual hybridization and cloning.

One additional criterion I support is that a native plant has been around long enough (probably 5 or 6 centuries) so that it’s finding a rightful place in an ecosystem. It has natural enemies, natural companions, and is not displacing any plant that has previously found its place in the ecosystem.

The truth is that few people outside of NPSOT members really care. The important things to most people are that native plants are hardier, demand less water and require less babying.

To be safe, the word “native” should be clarified by a geographic identifier like “a Hill Country native” or “New England native.” After all, every plant has natural beginnings somewhere. Actually the term “Texas native” can be misleading, since (for example) the Panhandle and the lower Gulf coast are vastly different.

So what is a native plant? It’s one of those things we all know, but putting it into words causes problems. We’ve existed just fine so far without a precise definition. Maybe we should just leave it alone.

Owen Yost is a Landscape Architect emeritus, and past president of the Trinity Forks chapter. He and Nancy Collins own the Wild Bird Center store in Denton.

WHEN DO I CLEAN UP MY GARDEN?

by Kathy Saucier

After our plants die back in the fall, we have the urge to spruce up our gardens by cutting back all the dead material to make it look kempt. We prune and rake until all the dead stems and leaves are cleaned up.

If at all possible, resist this urge until the end of February. And you ask why?

Many birds and other critters make use of the debris on the ground. Many of our spent flower heads are now abundant food sources. And ground-feeding birds pick through the leaves looking for bugs that use the dead plant material to hide in and feed upon. Without that cover, there will not be the food source. A picked-up yard is not very attractive to most birds, other than grackles, doves, starlings and house sparrows. Also the dead plant parts make nesting material for the birds, who I hear already begin searching for nesting spots at this time.

In addition to the benefits to wildlife, there are several gardening reasons, including insulating the ground. But at least for the sake of the wildlife, leave your seed heads, leaves and stems in place until the end of winter and enjoy nature.

NICE! NEEDS YOU

The NICE! committee needs a couple of new nursery reps to work with already participating nurseries. We have two nurseries, Lavender Ridge Farms and Landscape Supply of Gainesville that are in Gainesville. We also have two nurseries in Decatur, Main Street Home and Garden and Decatur Garden Center.

All of these nurseries have been with us for at least several seasons, if not the whole 2 years.

The nursery rep job consists of delivering color and black and white copies of the information sheet and the laminated copy for the sign at the beginning of each season.

These are made available to you either at a meeting preceding the season starting date or at Marilyn Blanton’s office in Denton.

It also involves contacting the nursery prior to the new selection to remind them of the upcoming species they need to stock, plus a follow up from time to time to see how the plants are moving for them and to build a relationship with the nursery. You may be as active with your nursery as you wish to be, with the above being the required.

If we could have one volunteer for the 2 in Gainesville and one for the 2 in Decatur, this would assure these nurseries being able to continue in the program. But the benefit to the volunteer is building a relationship with the owners and staff at our wonderful nurseries that are interested in promoting native plants.

Please contact Kathy Saucier at 972-492-4680 or gksaucier@verizon.net or Marilyn Blanton at 940-464-7775 or marilynblanton@verizon.net.

WINTER PLANTING by Jeremy Voss

For us in the North Central Texas area, now is the time to plant a few things. I will discuss three woody plants of the many natives to plant this time of year: Indian-currant /Coralberry/Buckbrush, Coral Honeysuckle and Beautyberry, all of which are robust, vigorous and well-adapted plants.

The 'how to plant' can be applied to any trees or woody shrubs and bushes. I encourage the planting of native food plants, such as Persimmon, Pecan, Oaks, Mexican Plum, Native Prairie Rose, among others, now. I will draw on my own experience and use Michael A. Dirr's *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, 5th ed.*, and the 'Native Plant Winter Garden' list compiled by Kathy Saucier as references and related species.

Planting a plant correctly is the most important thing to get your plants started, even when dealing with sturdy and adapted natives. They still have feelings. The hole dug should be 1.5 times deeper and twice as wide or wider than the container or root ball. The bottom of the hole should be wider than the top, like a short, stubby conical plant or the Eiffel Tower. The larger hole and wider bottom allow the plant a break when growing new roots into the native soil. Make sure the original soil is returned to the hole around the plant's root ball and LOOSELY packed. **Water thoroughly immediately.** These are the basics. Any extra is up to you.

•**Indiancurrant** (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus* Moench, Caprifoliaceae) will grow in sun to shade and in various soil types, such as found in Denton. As should always be noted, it is all a grand experiment and there are exceptions to every rule in nature; trial and error still apply. Its redeeming quality, aside from being native, is its tolerance of shade. It grows 2-5' tall and 4-8' wide into a spreading arching shrub creating a peaceful thicket. I'll call it semi-evergreen, since it keeps some leaves and its purplish-red, drupe-like berries through most of the winter. Pruning in early spring along with roses will encourage more flowering on new growth. Despite its hosting of various diseases and pests from Anthracnose to powdery mildew and scale, it keeps doing its thing. I love this plant. These are still around in many old yards in Denton, some grown up with the invasive exotic Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*). Indiancurrant is one of very few plants holding up to Privet in old grown-up properties. It is happy in the Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center and Patrick Peterson's land in Argyle where I visit, dig, propagate and watch it do what Indiancurrants do.

•**Coral Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera sempervirens* L., Caprifoliaceae) is just cool. It does best in full sun and will grow in most soil types, but does best in moist, well-drained, acid to near-neutral soil, according to Dirr. I have noticed it tapers off during the heat of summer in clay, but jumps back when temperatures lower and moisture increases. This species allows us endless

opportunities to expand our imaginations in the garden. As a twining vine, much more tame than Japanese Honeysuckle or Wisteria, it will form a nice mounding, lumpy ground cover 1-3' high, making an excellent low cover for small creatures, unless you give it something to climb on, in which case it will grow up, up, up... to the top, 10-20' or higher, depending on the structure. Trim the plants soon after flowering only, as trimming in the winter will remove flowers in the spring, since the honeysuckle blooms on old growth. Its beautiful soft, silvery-green foliage is quite pleasant to me and adds a unique texture to the garden. It has few pest problems. Hummingbirds love it! Do I need to mention the flowers are as interesting as the foliage? These plants have great landscape value. They can be grown on fences, trellises, old shrubs and small trees or some big fancy structure. Have fun and plant native.

•**American Beautyberry** (*Callicarpus americana* Thunb., Verbenaceae) is tough and beautiful and the birds like it. It prefers shady spots and forest edges. The week before Thanksgiving and my 30th birthday, I witnessed a small grayish-brown bird perch on my beautyberry and snack on the bright purple berries. This was the completion of a circle for me. The garden has completely served its purpose. It fed me throughout the year and now is feeding the native creatures. This plant is awesome. It grows well into late fall, when it drops its leaves and holds its abundant, provocatively-colored berry clusters until the beginning of winter. They are usually eaten or dried by that time, and seeds should be cold-stratified enough by December for sowing, according to Dirr. Being a course-textured, open shrub from 3-8' with its large fuzzy leaves adds some vertical interest to any garden. Trim these now to early spring, as they bloom on new growth like Indian-currant. The similar, white-fruited species is *C. lacteal*. To reduce maintenance and provide the best performance, I plant these in shade as an understory shrub or partial shade as a forest edge since water is limited and heat is abundant during the summer, and beautyberry prefers steady moisture. Beautyberry is abundant in East TX (Nacogdoches), where this beautiful plant entered my life, and in the Brazos Valley area (specifically the site of the developing Double H Bulb Farm, Caldwell, TX) where I dug up about 100 seedlings out of thousands in the sandy, silt loam soil. Beautyberry likes low fertility and is happy with no extra amenities. Trimming back a little, or to 18" from the ground, will encourage new growth and flowering. However, this plant is most appealing when its form is allowed to develop into the tall multi-leveled, gracefully arching shape familiar and unique to it, towering loosely over the garden and sometimes you. I love these too!

Remember to water thoroughly as a last step of planting woody plants. These three woody natives that I have discussed, as with most natives, need no care or very little attention once established. So plant them, love them, and enjoy their beauty. Experiment and have fun!

ROSETTES by Dorothy Thetford

January, February and March are the most challenging months of the wildflower season because one must learn to identify the emerging plant by its foliage vs. its flower. Many of the new plants appear in a low-lying, flat, form that is commonly called a rosette.

These are the secondary leaves of a new plant, and are normally arranged in an evenly spaced, circular design. You may find a rosette as small as a quarter or as large as twelve to fourteen inches in diameter. And, I must say that some of the rosettes are as beautiful as many of our wildflowers. There are several 'winners.'

The outer rim of the rosette is composed of larger and longer leaves, and each inner set of leaves decreases in size. It may be totally flat or it may be slightly elevated, depending on the fold of the leaves. For example, the native gaura rosette is totally flat, whereas the large, hairy, spiny, creased leaves of the thistle may be one to two inches tall, but still in the flat design. The rosette stage of development may last from 45 to 90 days following seed germination.

The early-blooming wildflowers are now in their rosette stage. In fact, Texas bluebonnets and Mexican hat (among others) were in rosette stage in late fall, and will be among the first plants to produce flowers this spring.

From the rosette stage, the plant will undergo a great change in appearance during growth and stem elongation. And once the plant reaches maturity, the basal leaves and/or rosette pattern may or may not be recognizable.

Rosettes are as interesting and intriguing as the mature plant, and much more challenging to identify. So, you're thinking, why bother? Well, when you learn to identify the small leaves of wildflowers in their rosette stage, it is easier to determine flower vs. weed in your flowerbed. And, the best time to transplant is normally when the

plant is very young and roots are very shallow, thus a greater likelihood of survival.

If your ranch or farm property is full of wildflowers, and you've always wanted to move some into your landscaped flowerbed, now's the time to make the move.

If you can't identify rosettes, now's the time to learn. Stake or tag several rosettes in your flowerbed, or wherever, and watch their stages of development. Once the flower stem shoots upward and produces buds and flowers, mission accomplished. From then on, you'll be able to recognize the rosette and know when to transplant.

January, February and March are not the only months for rosettes, of course. As long as seeds are germinating, in reality, rosettes are on-going.

Take a close look at your flowerbed, your lawn, pasture, walking trails and especially in the voids among your native prairie clump grasses; you'll be amazed to find the beginnings of our wildflower season.

Granted, every rosette is different, every leaf structure is different, and the sizes vary, but here's a jump-start list of a few that are visible (to me) as of this writing. Rosettes listed by common names are: anemone, baby blue-eyes, bergamot, black-eyed-Susan, bluebonnet, blue-eyed grass, coreopsis (lanceolata & tinctoria), cut-leaf daisy, fall aster, fleabane, gaura, golden groundsel, goldenrod, lyre-leaf sage, Mexican hat, obedient plant, phlox, prairie parsley, verbena, puccoon, spiderwort, Texas thistle, vervain, violet, white avens, wild red columbine, winecup, and yellow columbine.

And the winner is: Texas thistle! With its 12-14" diameter span of spiny, textured, pubescent leaves, this rosette exemplifies the most magnificent kaleidoscopic pattern you'll ever see. Let me know if you agree.

Dorothy Thetford has been a Trinity Forks Member since 1992 and is a roving ambassador for wildflowers with her "Wildflowers-of-Texas" photo cards & programs.

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