



Trinity Forks Native Plant Press

The Newsletter of Trinity Forks Chapter
Native Plant Society of Texas

February 2009

From the Prez

N 2 N – A No-Brainer

Fantasize with me for a moment. Every landscape, whether urban or rural, municipal or private, has the potential to reflect the healthy natural ecosystem that it now displaces. To the extent that we choose to landscape our communities in the first place, why not do so in a sustainable way, using native plants? Imagine gardens throughout Denton County that do not injure the land, use far less water than is now typical, and also restore a small piece of the vibrant ecosystem that initially drew people to Texas in decades and centuries past.

If our communities are again blanketed by a patchwork of native landscapes, then the birds, insects, and wildlife that evolved in parallel with these plants have a far greater chance to survive for future Texans to enjoy. Those creatures in turn, provide a service to their plant partners and our gardens by pollinating, transporting seeds to sites favorable to survival, and improving the soil, to say nothing of enriching our lives. This is the magic of nature's harmony that cannot occur when foreign & exotic plants populate or invade our Texas landscapes.

In addition, society would gain a healthier environment because native plants do not require pesticides or synthetic fertilizer, they use much less water, and don't have to be groomed continually with gas-powered equipment to keep looking nice. Maybe you already have a yard like that. Bravo! Now there's a plan to influence others to do the same. It's called Natives to Neighborhoods. Come – let's chat. There's a spot reserved for you Feb. 26 to hear all about it. It's a "no brainer".

Cathy Lustgarten

February 26 Meeting – N 2 N

Our very own president, Dr. Cathy Lustgarten, a Life Member of NPSOT, will present "Natives to Neighborhoods, A New Program for Sustainable Landscaping in Denton County". Cathy is a veterinary radiologist by profession, but wildflowers and native plants have been a life-long passion. Cathy worked tirelessly for her neighborhood association to redesign and replace their entry landscapes with native plants. Cathy uses native plants extensively in her home landscape, as many of us have had the pleasure of seeing.

NEW -- Trinity Forks Partnership

Our chapter has launched an exciting partnership with a new Keep Denton Beautiful committee called Project Post Oak. This project will continue educational development of the Post Oak park on the Denton Walmart property on Loop 288. NPSOT's role is to advise on restoration of a healthy viable Post Oak plant community within the currently botanically degraded Post Oak remnant, and then developing educational signage for the site. One of our first tasks is to perform a plant survey to assess what plants are on site, then develop a list of suitable plants to add and those to remove.

This should be loads of fun as well as educational for the participants. To help with the committee in general or the plant survey in particular, check out the sign-up sheet at the Feb. chapter meeting, or contact Cathy L. (see back of newsletter)

Workshop on Yard Cleanup – Feb 28

Date/Time: Feb 28, 9am to 1pm

Location: 2412 Shenandoah Trail, Denton

Cost: \$10/person, including lunch

Limited to 15 TF members.

TF members Jeremy Voss and Patrick Peterson will lead this workshop to demonstrate proper yard cleanup in preparation for Spring, including deadheading, trimming, and pruning of perennials and woody plants in a home landscape plus transplanting some native shrubs & grasses and removal of non-native shrubs. This will take place at Cynthia Maguire's home/yard. Money raised will help fund TF education/outreach activities. To make reservations, contact/pay Joan Phelps at the February meeting or 940-321-5980.

Lk. Ray Roberts Workday

Why: Prepare the Wildscape for Spring!!

Where: Ray Roberts/Isle Du Bois Interpretive Ctr.

When: Friday, March 6th, 9 AM

It's time to get our Native Wildscape Garden ready for spring!

Bring your gloves, shovels, pruners and whatever else you think will be helpful. Don't forget your water, and maybe even sunscreen. Consider bringing a lunch and/or snack and make it a day.

Questions? Contact Kathy Saucier, coordinator gksaucier@verizon.net

This project is a combined effort involving the Native Plant Society, Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists.

Science Education in Action

by Cynthia Maguire

In the January *Native Plant Press*, you probably read about the workday held last November in the **Benny J. Simpson Memorial Garden at Texas Woman's University**. People, plants and ideas really came together to meet a need. The whole result was greater than the sum of its parts. It was a great success, and I still hear good remarks about it from people when I meet them on campus.

As gardeners, we know there's always something else to do. This needs pruning, or that needs planting, or another one needs digging and dividing. TWU's gardens are no exception—they are just bigger than the ones we have at home. Grounds-keeping staff are stretched thinner this year than last as hiring freezes and a poor economic outlook take their toll. They are simply not in a position to make much progress by themselves in the TWU gardens this year. TWU's Landscape Services Supervisor **Bobby Trevino** welcomes our help, saying, "I think it would be a great idea. With the upcoming growing season, we can use all help available in maintaining the park areas." Knowing this, I am working with science students again this spring to organize a workday throughout the TWU gardens area. We have set the date and time—**Friday, March 6 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

So, this comes with a plea for your support. Some of you have plants that you would like to donate—we want them! Please dig them right away so that they have at least a week or two in the pot before we replant them. (While you're at it, dig a few more for the spring plant sale in April!) Some others may want to contribute money for purchased plants—we want money, too! If you want to contribute in this way, please bring your check to **Joan Phelps** at the February meeting. Make it out to Trinity Forks NPSOT and put "TWU garden" on the memo line.

Some have suggested that we concentrate on adding some of Benny Simpson's favorite natives to the TWU gardens. What a great idea! An investigation is underway to see what plants that might be. So far, **cherry sage** (*Salvia greggii*) and **desert willow**

(*Chilopsis linearis*) have been suggested. If any of you have knowledge of Benny's other favorites, I would greatly appreciate your sharing that with me.

Last, but not least, we need native plant people to supervise the student volunteers. To sign up, contact **Cynthia Maguire** (940-594-6555, cynthia.maguire@verizon.net). Then get ready to have a really good time on March 6th.

Cynthia is co-chair of the 2010 Symposium along with Cathy Lustgarten

WILDFLOWER AWARENESS

by Dorothy Brown Thetford

Common name: Fringed Puccoon

Botanical name: *Lithospermum incisum*

Family: Boraginaceae

Delicate and beautiful, but oftentimes too small to attract attention, the early-blooming fringed puccoon (*Lithospermum incisum*) must be inspected closely to be appreciated.

Each plant produces several erect stems, branched in the upper portions, with numerous bright yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers. The trumpet is approximately one inch long with five, conspicuously-fringed lobes (resembling ruffles). With ample rain in the early spring, plants may reach twelve inches tall. However, in our past rain-deprived springs, the normal height of our local plants has been six inches.

Bursting into bloom in mid-March, these lemon-yellow colored native wildflowers are usually sterile. However, in late spring and summer, small, inconspicuous, non-opening, self-fertilizing, whitish colored flowers emerge. From these hidden flowers, three or four large white stone-like seeds are produced. [Greek: 'lithos' means 'stone' and 'sperma' means 'seed']

Puccoon leaves are only 1/8 inch wide and are two to three inches long with a prominent center vein. They are a medium to dark shade of green and are easily recognized in the field in late February-March as individual clusters of green foliage scattered throughout the prairie.

History reveals that Native Americans brewed a tea from the puccoon plant and used it for birth control measures. They also used the long, red taproot for extracting a red dye for weaver's wool. And, recent interest has been shown in this perennial herb for potential medicinal value.

Fringed puccoon, also known as narrow-leaf puccoon or narrow-leaf gromwell, is found throughout Texas in sandy soils of open woods, prairies, and roadsides. The bright yellow blooms do not close in the evening and truly appear to have a vivid glow after sunset. They should be blooming soon, so dust off your lens and be ready to inspect the ruffled edges of this unique flower.

Dorothy, a Trinity Forks member since 1992 and a former president, is a roving ambassador for wildflowers with her "Wildflower-of-Texas" photo cards and programs.

Using Native Grasses in the Landscape

by Owen Yost, Landscape Architect emeritus

A clump of native grass (sometimes called “ornamental grass”) is very unique and attractive. It’s also extremely durable in our soil, just as it is. The challenge it poses is our unfamiliarity with using it in the home landscape, despite the facts that it can dramatically cut the maintenance your yard requires and is incredibly water-efficient.

A “clump” might consist of almost any native prairie grass such as indiagrass, bluestem, plume grass, feathergrass or side-oats gramma (our official state grass). I want to be clear; these are not substitutes for common lawn grasses, Bermuda and St. Augustine, which require a lot of water and are non-native. Native grasses are something almost no other person has in their landscape.

Confusion exists when you say the word “grass”. Most people (certainly not NPSOT members) visualize lawns. However, the native prairie grasses are what greeted the early settlers when they followed the Natchez Trace down here, encountered a few Indians and Mexicans and began calling this region their home (remember the “amber waves of grain”?)

Depending on the species of native grass (and there are around 500), it can grow to a foot tall, 10 feet tall, or anywhere in between. The roots descend to incredible depths (mature buffalograss roots can be 8 to 10 feet deep), making them unusually drought-tolerant. An established clump of native grass hardly ever needs watering (only in an emergency). It’s very durable and disease-resistant too. Artificial fertilizer can actually encourage diseases since the grasses have, over the ages, adapted to our miserable soil, and have adjusted to growing on the meager nutrition the soil yields.

On the other hand, traditional lawn grasses like Bermuda and St. Augustine aren’t found in north Texas naturally. They’re imported. They require frequent and expensive pampering, in the form of watering, fertilization, mowing, weeding and soil amendment. Often they’ll turn brown anyway. Native grasses don’t need any of that artificial stuff.

Planting native grasses is amazingly easy. Just choose a well-drained spot that gets sun most or all of the day. Then plant (or transplant) grass plants just like any other landscape plant, except forget about adding fertilizer or any other expensive soil amendment. You may not see a lot of above-ground growth in the first several months, but the roots of the grasses will be growing vigorously.

Once the grass does grow, there’s almost nothing for you to do. Don’t fertilize, don’t add a lot of water, don’t prune – just let it grow like it did centuries ago on the Great Plains. If it looks objectionable in the winter, in January you can cut it down to 8 or 10 inches from the ground, but that’s not horticulturally necessary.

Masses of little bluestem grass, muhly or switchgrass are a soft orange all winter long, and should become a solid mass in just a few seasons. In the growing season, a clump of native grass is a brilliant green, often accompanied by a feathery plume each fall. I like to use native grasses in areas where the soil is notoriously poor, and the homeowners will let it expand naturally. It can easily be used in man-made spaces such as the parking lot median in front of my store at 1601 Brinker Rd. – the Wild Bird Center. There, the median is engulfed in a greenish/purple mass of Gulf Muhly grass all summer long, and far into the fall.

No species of native grass needs special fertilizer, soil amendments or a lot of water. All but a few native grasses require full sun. Fortunately, most yards in this area have plenty of sun. The one native grass that does well in shade, Inland Sea Oats, is difficult to contain, and tends to spread wherever it feels like growing, so should be used only in carefully-maintained or isolated spaces.

Only a few nurseries have these grasses in stock at this time of year. You might even want to order some from a catalog. (Be careful to get the kinds that grow in north Texas, and avoid the imported/Asian varieties). Another option is to actually dig a few plants from a field, provided the owner gives permission and a good number remain. Also, they’re often “rescued” from the future site of a building or parking lot. A source I rely on, if local nurseries don’t have native grasses, is Bluestem Nursery in Arlington www.bluestemnursery.com.

Native grasses can be used in the residential landscape in many ways. In my practice, I’ve found that there are three potentially dramatic uses:

- A large mass of native grasses (at least 150 sq. ft.) is a very strong design element, especially when used in an organic, curving shape. In winter, the mass of native grasses makes the drab dark green of our ever-green trees come to life.
- Many of the medium-height native grasses create an attractive backdrop for colorful flowers planted in the foreground. Like all native grasses, they’ll need almost no special attention.
- Two or three plants of a tall (6 feet or more) native grass species create a dramatic statement, taking the place of something like a short tree or tall shrubs.

At the very least try a clump or two in the corners of your yard. It’s likely that you’ll be planting even more as the years go by and cutting back on the temperamental, costly plants you’re used to seeing.

Owen Yost is a Landscape Architect emeritus and has been a member of the Trinity Forks chapter for over 15 years. He is a former chapter president and former NPSOT officer.

Native Plant Society of Texas
Trinity Forks Chapter
P.O. Box 425491
Denton, Texas 76204



February 2009

Trinity Forks Contact Information

President - Cathy Lustgarten, 972-306-1088
drgoodrad@verizon.net

Vice Pres. - Marilyn Blanton, 940-464-7775

Secretary - Lon Turnbull, 940-323-8999

Treasurer - Joan Phelps, 940-321-5980

Membership-Laurie Hammett, 940-383-3287

Hospitality - Fonda Fox, 940-627-2343

Newsletter - Mike Mizell, 940-382-8551
birdmizell@msn.com

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 7:00pm on the 3rd 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.

Membership Corner

We give a big Thank-You to all these folks who have renewed their memberships in Trinity Forks since December. Hope to see you at the next meeting. You are what makes Trinity Forks special!

Joan E. Phelps, Corinth

Diana Block & Dan Mauldin, Denton

Jim Smith, Aubrey

Kathy Saucier, Carrollton

Christina Wasson, Denton

Elizabeth L. Bailey, Denton

Irene Hanson, Flower Mound

Joanne & Ron Fellows, Shady Shores,

Joan B. Stanley, Highland Village

Jeremy Voss, Denton

Glena D. Allen, Aubrey

Laurie J. Hammett, Denton

Lucianne Blakemore, Oak Point

Bobbie Ashley, Decatur

Website: www.npsot.org/TrinityForks