



# Trinity Forks Native Plant Press

The Newsletter of Trinity Forks Chapter  
Native Plant Society of Texas

September 2009

*From the Prez*

## Texas Native Plant Week

We asked for it -- we got it! On June 19, the state legislature signed a declaration that the third full week of October every year shall be Texas Native Plant Week, in which we celebrate and promote native Texas plants. A NPSOT member wrote the proposal and presented it before the legislature, where it passed unanimously. This event is a fitting corollary to Texas Wildflower Day the 4th Saturday each April, which was established nearly 30 years ago through the efforts of NPSOT founding members, including our own chapter member and then-TWU President, Dr. Mary Evelyn Huey.

An entire week was chosen to honor Texas native plants instead of a single day to allow maximum participation by schools. Events and promotional activities developed by NPSOT members and chapters are what will give meaning to Native Plant Week and turn it into much more than ink dried on a calendar page. Our chapter has asked staff at Ray Roberts Lake SP interpretive center and all our NICE! nurseries to create displays or other activities honoring Native Plant Week. Trinity Forks V-P Marilyn Blanton (and next year's Education Chair) is busy organizing a 3rd-grade art contest, whose winning entries will be displayed at city libraries and businesses. I'm sure Marilyn will appreciate any assistance from chapter members, so don't be bashful about contacting her. We hope this small beginning will grow in future years as we develop additional ways to call attention to the importance of native Texas plants while celebrating our own special Week.

*Cathy Lustgarten*, "wild about Beauty Berry Bush" this week.

*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 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Administration & Clock Tower (ACT) building at Texas Woman's University in Denton. ACT is located at Oakland Ave. & Administration Drive. The meeting begins at 7:00pm on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.*

## Sep. 24 Mtg. -- Birds, Bees & Native Plants

Cynthia Maguire's appreciation of the plant community outside her back door is deeper and richer than ever before. She sees not only an attractive landscape, but a home for many of God's creatures. As her collection of native plants has become more diverse, so has the wildlife that calls her garden 'home.' Numerous kinds of birds and butterflies, moths, frogs, and a gecko family share the land. Cynthia credits Trinity Forks, saying, "I now find myself choosing a new plant just because it will entice a certain animal into my garden. None of this would have happened if I had not been introduced to the value of native plants by members of Trinity Forks."

She will share her knowledge of the interactions between birds, bees and native plants with members and guests on Thursday, September 24, 2009 at 7:00 p.m.

Plan to come—and *bring a friend!*

## PLANT SALE IS COMING October 10th

**Location:** Park area between Senior Ctr. & swimming pool along Bell Ave. in Denton. This is 2 blocks south of the TWU campus. We will be just behind the parking area.

**Time:** 9 am until noon or sold out. Members please arrive at 8 am to unload plants and help set up; please stay to help clean up at noon.

**Publicity:** We need lots of help with publicity. Please help by distributing flyers to businesses you frequent, where you work, and by word of mouth to friends, family, neighbors, other clubs you belong to, etc.

**Start digging!** Now is the time to inventory the extras in your yard and get them potted. Give them about 3 weeks to heal and look good after being dug up. Nice looking plants sell better!! With the recent rains, now is the time to get them out of the ground. Please let me know what plants you THINK you will be digging. In order to place our consignment plant order, we need an idea of what plants will be provided by our members. You can give me a definite list a couple of weeks before the sale. So please contact me with your sale plants at the phone number or email address below. All plants must be native to Texas and do well in our area. To know for sure go to the accepted list of plants found on our web site

<http://www.npsot.org/TrinityForks/TrinityForksWeb/plant%20sales.html> and click on the Spring 2009 plant sale Excel file. If you can't find your plant in this list go to [http://www.npsot.org/TrinityForks/TrinityForksWeb/plant\\_s.html](http://www.npsot.org/TrinityForks/TrinityForksWeb/plant_s.html) and look through the various plant lists.

If you still cannot find it, contact Kathy Saucier and ask. Any plants that need to be approved by our committee must be done so 2 weeks prior to the sale. That would be September 26th. [gksaucier@verizon.net](mailto:gksaucier@verizon.net) 972-492-4680

## **WILDFLOWERS-OF-TEXAS**

*by Dorothy Brown Thetford*

Common name: Eryngo

Botanical name: (*Eryngium leavenworthii*)

Family: Apiaceae

"Look, but don't touch" are two explicit instructions with which we're familiar, but which are associated primarily with children. However, when it comes to one of Texas' most beautiful wildflowers, these four words apply to adults, also.

Eryngo, pronounced 'ear-ring-o,' (*Eryngium leavenworthii*) is truly a jewel to behold in the heat of late summer. It can be found along fencerows, open prairies, ditches and weedy, abandoned pastures.

Single, stout, two to three-foot plants are covered with closely-spaced, alternate, deeply incised, sessile (without a stalk) leaves. Each three-to-five lobed leaf has definite pointed spines at each tip. Lower leaves may be blue-green in color; upper leaves blend from blue-green to shades of lavender and, ultimately, to purple.

The flower head is shaped like a miniature pineapple about 1 1/2 inches tall and 3/4 inch in diameter. The pale bluish-green head matures to bright purple and is very tightly packed with minute, 5-petaled, tubular flowers. As each flower exerts its pale blue filament and anther (stamen) from the bottom upward, the color combination is unbelievably, breathtakingly beautiful, i.e., providing a light blue aura surrounding the deep purple color.

To complete this unique structure, a set of spiny bracts cradles the base of the flower head, and another set crowns the top of the flower head. By looking directly down on the top center of an individual eryngo flower, one can see nature's ultimate kaleidoscope, with sharp spines flaring out in every direction.

This annual native wildflower, found throughout Texas, blooms simultaneously with our wildflower called, snow-on-the-prairie (*Euphorbia bicolor*), and is well worth the search. If you have an opportunity to inspect it under a magnifying lens, you'll be well rewarded by seeing eryngo's uniqueness. However, look, but don't touch!

*Dorothy, a TF member since 1992 and a former president, is a roving ambassador for wildflowers with her City Nature Hikes, DISD programs, and her photo cards. Her "Wildflowers-of-Texas" greeting card line is available locally at Cupboard Natural Foods.*

## **Turn a Ho-Hum Yard into a Nature Habitat**

*by G. Owen Yost*

A backyard nature habitat, as chapter members know, is a whole lot less maintenance than a traditional yard. It's also extremely instructive and interesting to watch as birds learn to fly, plants come up where you hadn't planted any, possums raise a family, rabbits emerge from a den etc. It's all possible - even in the middle of the city.

Now, just as trees and shrubs are starting to lose leaves, is by far the best time to convert your yard to a nature habitat. The size of your yard doesn't make much difference. It can be a tenth of an acre, or much larger. What matters is what you have in your yard.

### **Plant native plants**

Following the advice of NPSOT members, start with native plants. Since they are used to our native soil, they wreak the least havoc on our ecosystem. No havoc at all, if they're already in the ground! These are the plants that our native wildlife has come to know over the centuries. The plants go to seed, produce nectar, lose their leaves etc. in harmony with the schedule of our native wildlife, including birds.

### **Plant a variety of plants**

It's wise to offer something to every creature that might possibly appear in your backyard habitat. The more kinds of native plants you have, the better the chances of appealing to some natural creature. A monoculture of all lawn (or even all horseherb or all lantana) has a very narrow appeal.

### **Provide food & water**

All animals need food, of course. However when there's food left outdoors that doesn't get eaten right away, it's called "garbage" and attracts un-natural animals like rats. Example: at our house we put out nuts for the squirrels. But if the nuts don't get eaten that day, they get swept up. The best thing is to have native, fruit-bearing plants around (such as Mexican plum) as well as several bird-friendly plants (I like lantana and mistflower).

### **Provide shelter & housing**

Nature's creatures all need places to escape from bad weather and to nest. In nature, that means an abundance of wild plants, especially grasses. I've enjoyed an incredible abundance of activity in and around a brush pile in my yard. A brush pile is simply a randomly piled mound of branches (no leaves or grass clippings) several feet high. All this "clutter" attracts wildlife incredibly well. For people who are worried about rats - owls and hawks (the best rodent control in existence) love hanging around brush piles.

*Owen Yost is a Landscape Architect, a former chapter president, former NPSOT officer, and owner of Denton's Wild Bird Center.*

## Come Hither, Bumblebee, and Pollinate

*by Anne Raver, The New York Times, April 29, 2009*

My native black cherry tree is covered with little white flowers, and if the bees and other pollinators do their job, I'll have plenty of sweet black cherries by midsummer.

My Korean spicebushes (*Viburnum carlesii*) are also in full bloom, their clusters of pinkish-white flowers filling the air with the heady scent of cinnamon and honey. But it's striking how few bees are sipping nectar from these Asian shrubs compared with my native redbud and sassafras trees, which are literally vibrating with pollinators.

It bears out the research that Gordon Frankie, an entomologist at the University of California, Berkeley, has begun in gardens around that city, where he and his students have surveyed 1,000 different plants, both native and nonnative.

"Only 50 were native plants, but of that 50, 80 percent were attractive to pollinators," Professor Frankie said. "In contrast, only 10 percent of the 950 non-natives were attractive to pollinators."

My spicebushes don't seem to be among those pollinator favorites, but I would never trade them, or my Asian lilacs and peonies, for natives. So I am adding native plants wherever I can to feed the pollinators — in particular the native bees, because there are so many different species, and far fewer nonnative ones, like the European honeybee (*Apis mellifera*), which doesn't seem to be much in evidence around my old farm in Maryland these days.

Douglas W. Tallamy, an ecologist at the University of Delaware, and the author of "Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in our Gardens" (Timber Press, 2007), inspired my new plantings. "We have 4,000 species of native bees in North America," Mr. Tallamy said. "If we gave them food — flowering native plants — and a place to build their nests, they would be able to take up the slack from decreasing honeybee populations."

While some native bees are particular about the plants they like, about half are generalists, scientists say, which explains why I see native bumblebees and mason bees on my pear tree, an Asian plant. And why my unmown yard is abuzz with pollinators, from tiny wasps and flies to solitary native bees, nuzzling the dandelions (transglobal weeds), violets (found throughout the temperate world) and clover (largely European).

So don't be too quick to mow. Those so-called weeds are important sources of food for pollinators, which need protein and sugar to build up their populations. We need to keep feeding them from early spring to hard frost if we want vigorous, well-pollinated plants.

Crops like tomatoes, peas and beans are self-pollinating, but they still have to be shaken by the wind or bees to release the pollen inside the flowers. Bumblebees and a few other native bees are able to vibrate the flower — something a European honeybee cannot do — shaking pollen from the stamens to the stigma, where it fertilizes the ovules that will become seeds inside a pod (think snap peas or green beans!) or fruit (juicy tomatoes! strawberries!). These bees also travel from flower to flower, cross-pollinating, which improves the vigor of plants and the size of that tomato.

Other crops like the cucurbits — melons, cucumbers and squash — are entirely dependent on pollinators for fertilization, because they have separate male and female flowers.

Both honeybees and natives do an excellent job of pollinating such plants when they are around, but all these pollinators are in serious decline from many stressors, and scientists suspect that habitat loss is key.

David Salman, the founder and chief horticulturist at High Country Gardens, a mail-order nursery in Santa Fe, N.M., said he has noticed a big decrease in pollinators as the fields of wildflowers around his greenhouses have been developed.

"I'm not getting the seed production I used to, because I'm physically cut off from pollinators," he said. "I am excited beyond words about this resurgence in home food production, but the big thing left out of the equation is bringing pollinators into these gardens, particularly in urban areas."

In the kitchen garden, where many plants are a mix of European, Asian and American species, I don't worry so much about whether an herb or flower that attracts pollinators is native or not. I just go for diversity, and it all seems to work out.

So I'm not going to give up my Mediterranean lavender, catmint, oregano or any of the other age-old plants imported to the New World. I'm just packing in more natives.

In a wide border around the kitchen garden, I've planted Purple Smoke, a native baptisia or indigo, with charcoal stems and violet-blue flowers the same shape as those of the sugar-snap and snow peas climbing a nearby fence. And I've put in two indigo plants, rather than one, to get a good six-foot-wide clump, because according to my "Pollinator Conservation Handbook" (Xerces Society/The Bee Works, 2003), native pollinators are more likely to home in on flowers when they're in masses at least four feet across.

I've put in more native coneflowers, too: *Echinacea purpurea*, the purple coneflower, and *E. paradoxa*, the yellow coneflower, as well as black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*) and *Rudbeckia maxima*, the so-called cabbage-leaf coneflower, a six-foot plant with big blue-green leaves and bright yellow flowers.

"I love the purple coneflowers and rudbeckias, the ratibidas, or prairie coneflowers, which are all wonderful for bumblebees," Mr. Salman said. "If you have melons and squash, plant these right in the patch."

Other native perennials that provide plenty of nectar and pollen include giant hyssop, coreopsis, larkspur, Joe-pye weed, blanket flower, sunflower, lupine, evening primrose, poppy, penstemon, salvia and sedum. Annual and biennial flowers like milkweed, spider flower, cosmos, poppy, mullein, daisy and verbena also draw pollinators. So do wild roses and blueberry bushes, raspberry and blackberry brambles, elderberry and sumac, and nonnative herbs like lavender, mint, basil, marjoram, rosemary, borage and lantana. And don't forget late-summer favorites like goldenrod and asters.

Ecologists are encouraging home gardeners to experiment with all these plants, and to observe what pollinates what. It's as fascinating as bird-watching.

Native Plant Society of Texas  
Trinity Forks Chapter  
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**September 2009**

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**Membership Corner**

We give a big 'Thank You' to all these folks who have renewed their memberships in Trinity Forks recently and hope to see you at the next meeting. You are what makes Trinity Forks special!

*Jim & Marilyn Blanton, Argyle,*

*John E. Vandigriff, Lewisville*

*Cecil & Polly Carter, Shady Shores*

*Mark Chapin, Argyle*

*Cheryl Kesterson, Denton*

*Hugh Garnett, Pottsboro*

*Caroline S. Polliard, Denton*

*Dorothy & Alan Thetford, Denton*

*Marshall & Fonda Fox, Decatur*

*Mary Curry, Greenwood*

*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.*

**Website:** [www.npsot.org/TrinityForks](http://www.npsot.org/TrinityForks)