



THE TEXAS SAGE

Native Plant Society of Texas, North Central Chapter Newsletter
Volume 15, Number 11
December 2003

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The President's Corner



What is wrong with these people? I get an email from Jeff Quayle saying he's been cited for high grass—Inland Seoats. My neighbor gets upset because I mulch his side

of the fencerow. Then, one of our newest members, Taylor Parker-Stephens, receives a city complaint that her flowers are too high—*Rudbeckia hirta*.

Well, one of the positive ways to encourage the "native movement" is to invite your friends and neighbors to the BRIT lecture series at the Ft Worth Botanic Gardens. On November 6 Dr. George Diggs presented a program on "East Texas as a Unique Ecosystem: From Big D to the Big Thicket." That area has 3329 species of native plants, which represent two thirds of the estimated 5,000 species in the entire state of Texas and one sixth of all the plant species in the United States. He called it "a junction where grasslands and forest come together...a biological crossroads."

NPSOT displayed its own diversity that evening by providing over 40 dozen cookies for the BRIT reception. Thanks to all of you.

Another important event to encourage the native movement was our Native Plant Landscape Course, taught by Steven Chamblee in November. He explained how important natives are to our environment to the 22 registrants, described our water situation and the hazards of using chemicals. He showed the class several slides of native plants that do well in our area, then helped everyone with their personal landscape plans. The Board will discuss further if we want to pursue additional classes.

I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving, and don't forget to pick up those neighborhood leaves and put them in your compost pile. And be sure to make the next meeting. We'll have a great program and we will vote on new officers for 2004. The slate is as follows: President, Gailon Hardin; Vice President, Pat Lovejoy; Secretary, Hester Schwartz; Treasurer, Devanie Ferguson; I hope to see you all at the next meeting. Until then,

Gailon



Above left: NPSOT members demonstrated cookie diversity at the last BRIT lecture. Above right: At the native plant landscaping class, instructor Steven Chamblee worked on designs with Sandy Balch, Ft Worth; Janet Burns, Granbury; Polly Parmer, Granbury; Vicky Neal, Ft Worth; and Elaine Couch, Arlington.



Contents

The President's Corner
Butterfly of the Month
Garden Cuttings
Plant of the Month

1
2
2
3

December meeting:

Thursday, December 4, 7:00 pm, Fort Worth Botanic Gardens

This month Leeann Rosenthal will present "**Backyard Habitats**". Leeann is a Texas Master Naturalist and NPSOT member. She will illustrate the many things we can do to provide water, natural food, and shelter to our many backyard animal species.

Butterfly of the Month: The Mourning Cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*) Joann Karges



This is a dark butterfly, hence its common name in North America, but it is a strikingly beautiful butterfly. Noted lepidopterist Robert M. Pyle, author of the Audubon Society

Field Guide to North American Butterflies, describes it: "A fresh mourning cloak is a bright and lively thing, concocted of chocolate wings, French vanilla borders, and blueberry spatters near the margins." This butterfly flies here only in the cooler months, from November through spring. It does occasionally brood here—most often on willow (*Salix* sp.) but it may choose plants in at least six other families for its

larval host plant. My personal experience testifies to one of its choices. On March 25, 2003, I spotted the female laying eggs on the new leaves of hackberry (*Celtis reticulata*). I could not watch the development of the caterpillars as they were too high in the tree, but one month later the area was alive with the full-grown caterpillars ready to pupate, and I watched this process. On May 7, the butterflies began emerging from their chrysalids, and I had for the first time a swarm of these butterflies. Probably most of them would drift northward to mate and begin the life cycle anew.

This butterfly is known throughout much of North America, but also in western Europe and temperate Asia. In England, it is known as the Camberwell Beauty.

Mourning cloaks rarely come to flowers. They are attracted to animal excreta, to dead animals, and to decaying fruit. You may attract them with very rotten fruit, such as bananas, pears, and apples—even in winter.

Garden Cuttings Jim Leavy—Reprinted from The Texas Sage, December 1998

Fall is definitely here and perhaps by the time you read this, Jack Frost will have struck. This is a time to start cleaning up the garden and readying it for winter. Remember to consider all the wildlife you have invited into your garden before you start pruning and clipping. Anything with seed heads and berries should be left standing for as long as you can tolerate. Even those few coneflower heads could make a nice lunch for a goldfinch or any other feathered or furry friend. The blooms of *Salvia greggii* will be dwindling, so this would be a good time to light shear them to at least where the bloom spikes begin on the branch, or even a few inches farther in order to promote a tight plant. Save a drastic shearing of Autumn Sage until after its spring blooms start to dwindle. This pruning regime will increase the likelihood that the severely pruned plant will leaf out properly and continue fulfilling its niche in the garden. A *Salvia greggii* that is severely pruned back to wood in the winter may never come back and simply rot in the ground. Don't ask me why.

Ruellia brittoniana and 'Chi-Chi' *Ruellia* can be pruned back to the ground at this point. Seed or no seed, they share it too readily with the rest of the world. Now if we could devise a mechanism that would spread the word as efficiently as the Mexican Petunias, our job would be done. Again, all plants except those that are tender or really come on with the heat can be planted or transplanted.

As you prune shrubs and trees and cut back your perennials, start mulching each finished area little by little instead of in one fell swoop. This will save your back and make the job less tedious or boring. Mulch with whatever organic matter you have available. If you have been doing this every year, then you should have some mulch left beneath the plants. Try to replenish that layer (3 to 4 inches under trees and shrubs; 2 to 3 inches under perennials and annuals). In any case, try to finish the task before the freezes of January and February arrive. Then, if you don't already have enough to do, donate some time to making our demonstration gardens look wonderful. Your help is always needed and appreciated. Thanks—and happy gardening!

Demo Garden Opportunities

Granbury Road Subcourthouse Meet at the site on second Saturdays and last Tuesdays for general maintenance. We begin at 9:00 am and work for 2 or 3 hours. The subcourthouse is 2 miles south of Loop 820 on Granbury Road. Contact Gailon Hardin, 817-457-4703, or ghardin@flash.net, for more information about the garden.

Hulen Library We meet at the garden for grooming and maintenance on the last Thursday of the month at 10:00 am October through April, other days as needed. Contact Ev Woodrey at 817-295-4683 for additional information.

The Molly Hollar Wildscape Workdays are on the first Saturday of every month at Veterans Park, 9:00 am until noon. Activities include planting, gathering seed, weeding, pruning etc. For information, contact Molly Hollar at 817-860-5580.

Native Plant of the Month: Possumhaw Holly *Amy Trauth Nare*

Possumhaw holly, *Ilex decidua*, is a member of the Aquifoliaceae, or aptly, the Holly family. The genus *Ilex* contains about 400 species and has a cosmopolitan distribution. Hollies are a conspicuous part of our landscape, owing to their deep green foliage and orange-to-red berries that brighten holiday wreaths and decoration. The economic value of hollies, including possumhaws, lies not only in the decorative nature of the berries, but also in the hard white wood they produce. It is worthy to note that hollies grow very slowly, making it difficult for individual stands to recover from seasonal harvesting by holiday decorators. If you are a consumer of holly boughs during the Christmas season, you might consider growing a plant on your yard for personal consumption to reduce demand.

Possumhaw hollies are found commonly throughout the southeastern United States and reach their westernmost distribution here in north-central Texas. The leaves of



possumhaw lack the spiny

edges so common in this group, but have rather lovely rounded margins. Leaves tend to be obovate in shape, narrow, glossy, dark green and 2-3" long. As the species name implies, possumhaws lose their leaves each fall, but not before turning a dull purplish green to yellow. This species is mostly dioecious, a Latin term for "two houses" that means the male and female flowers are in separate plants. You might miss the flowers of possumhaw holly, or most any other holly for that matter. The flowers are white and so small they are often described as inconspicuous. Bees are thought to be the primary pollinators, but recent research suggests that the wind could also be an important pollen vector. The fruit, by comparison,

is the most conspicuous part of a possumhaw during the winter months. The naked branches come alive with those bright red berries that ripen in September and persist until March. This species is an upright shrub with a spreading, rounded crown and typically grows 7-15' tall.

Possumhaws are easily grown in full sun to part shade. They are adaptable to both light and heavy soils, but prefer moist, acidic, organic soils. For the best show of berries, plant female plants with at least one male plant to ensure that pollination will take place. Prune to shape in early spring just before new growth begins. By planting possumhaw holly in your yard, you will provide an important food source for birds, deer, and a variety of small mammals, including opossums, as the common name suggests.



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Chapter President
 North Central Chapter
 Native Plant Society of Texas
 2311 Perkins Rd
 Arlington, TX 76016

Next Meeting

Thursday, December 4

7:00 pm

Fort Worth Botanic Gardens

Backyard Habitats

by

Leeann Rosenthal

Texas Master Naturalist

Visit us on the Web at
www.txnativeplants.org

Join the Native Plant Society of Texas!

We invite you to participate as a member of the Native Plant Society of Texas. Membership is open to any individual, family, or organization. Membership is renewable annually and extends for a year from the date we receive your original payment.

If you wish to join, please indicate your category of membership, then clip and mail this application along with the appropriate remittance to:

Native Plant Society of Texas
 P.O. Box 891, Georgetown, TX 78627
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For changes of address or information about contributing to the newsletter, please contact the newsletter editor.

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