



THE TEXAS SAGE

Native Plant Society of Texas, North Central Chapter Newsletter

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The President's Corner



Recently a local newspaper published an article by a DFW-area radio horticulture personality, Neil Sperry. Sperry asked the question, "Are native plants better because they already grow here

and are suited to our soils and weather?" His answer was mostly negative. He began by explaining that post oaks plants native to sandy red soils are not suitable for black gumbo found a couple miles east of that sandy area. Then he made the comparison that El Paso plants are not native in Beaumont. Maybe that's why Andy and Sally Wasowski wrote about 10 vegetative areas in Texas. Sperry pointed out that hackberries are native to all North Texas soils but said that they are ugly. I guess he forgot the birds and small mammals that eat the berries, and at least three species of butterflies that use the leaves as a host, ugly or not. I need to talk to my wildlife about eating better-looking flora.

He challenged readers to list all native grasses suited for turf. Turf: Why do we need turf other than to mow, edge, water, fertilize, and weed? He said that buffalograss is the only native grass for turf, but the negative is that Bermuda takes over. Yes, Bermuda does take over when the homeowner gives it the water it

requires. Isn't that the reason we use natives so we don't need to use as much water? Sperry also noted that there is no chemical control for weeds in Bermuda. Well, that's the most sensible thing he said in the article; however, I don't think he meant it that way. He wants one more pollutant to enter our waterways.

Sperry suggested that it is time to rethink the concept of natives being best; instead use a plant that is adapted, not native, have an attractive landscape with as little maintenance as possible, and conserve water. For shrubs he recommended Chinese crape myrtles, which are consumed by powdery mildew and aphids. But wait, Neil has a chemical answer to the fungus and pest control. He also recommended Japanese nandinas, which are taking over our native woods without providing suitable wildlife food.

On October 2nd, the Organic Garden Club of Fort Worth is touring my garden from 10:00 am to noon. My front yard is approximately 30,000 square feet, has no grass and is not finished (Will it ever be?). Please feel free to come by and offer suggestions. The address is 2311 Perkins Rd, Arlington, TX 76016, Mapsco 80Y. Look for the natives and two or three adapted plants.

Join us on October 7th for our annual native plant swap. Pat Lovejoy has provided details. NO RAFFLE, but everyone will take home a prize. Until then,

Gailon

October meeting:
Thursday, October 7, 7:00 pm, Fort Worth Botanic Gardens

The October meeting is our annual plant swap with a twist! We will meet at 6:00 in the Orchid Room of the Botanic Gardens and head outside for a tour by Steven Chamblee of the new xeriscape garden at the north entrance.

We'll return to the Orchid Room to feast on heavy snacks and refreshments and have our plant swap. Please put some kind of identification on your plant and be prepared to tell everyone about it.

Butterfly of the Month: The Harvester *Joann Karges*



The Harvester (*Feniseca tarquinus*) is unique among North American butterflies because it is carnivorous. Not the adult butterfly, of course; no butterfly or moth has the mouth parts for such a diet, but rather it is the larvae that are flesh-eating. They are very particular about their meals, however, eating only woolly aphids and other minute homopterans such as leafhoppers.

A small (a little over one inch) bright orange and black butterfly above, it is a paler orange on the underside with darker orange spots ringed in faint white. The butterflies hover near the aphid colonies found on various species of trees and bushes, especially alder. The female lays her eggs among the aphids. In 3 or 4 days the tiny larvae emerge and begin to eat the aphids, often in a silken web that may be covered with aphid carcasses. Development is fast: In about 8 days, they pupate. (Viewed from the top the flattened pupa resembles a monkey's head.) In about ten days, the butterflies emerge.

Harvesters do not nectar on flowers. They lap up honeydew that the aphids secrete and also go to tree sap, dung, carrion, and mud puddles.

Primarily an eastern North American species, this year they have been relatively common in the Austin area and at least one has been found in Collin County. John and Mary Tveten record the butterfly and larvae almost every year on the cedar elms in their Houston area home. We had one sighting in 2003 in Tarrant County; we should be finding this butterfly more often.



A Harvester in Tarrant County. Photo by Martin Reid.

Garden Cuttings *Jim Leavy*

Fall is for planting! When the temperatures fall to the low eighties or below, it is time to dust off the spade and start transplanting, dividing, replanting, and reconfiguring.

Trees usually transplant best when they are dormant or lose their leaves in the fall. The novice gardener may want to wait until after November. New trees can be planted now. Anyone looking for a fall color tree should pick one when it has put on its new foil. Shumard red oak (*Quercus shumardii* var. *shumardii*) can vary from tones of brown to orange to red because of genotypic variation as well as the past year's climatic changes. Texas ash can vary from tones of brown to yellow to purple. Picking a tree that displays red leaves one year will increase the likelihood of a tree that displays red leaves in most years.

Most shrubs can be successfully moved now by carefully digging an adequate root ball and reducing the top growth by one third to a half. If you are new to gardening, wait until the plant goes dormant to increase your chance of success.

Most perennials can be moved and divided now with little worry. Any perennial with a basal rosette of leaves should be trimmed to those leaves after transplanting; others should have their foliage reduced at least by half in order to ensure survival after a move. Some perennials have very long taproots (*Asclepias* spp.) and should be left until winter to move. Some perennials may be tender like pavonia, anisacanthus, or lantana, and should not be moved until spring when temperatures are in the 70s. These tender perennials that tend to thrive in the heat may not winter well even as newly planted pots in the fall, especially if we have a cold, wet winter.

Grasses can be divided now, but you will probably miss their full potential unless they are cool-weather grasses. Wait until they have pushed their inflorescences to the fullest, and then cut them back to the ground before moving and dividing.

Many plants, especially newly planted ones, wilt during the afternoon sun. Many new gardeners might water right then. The experienced gardener will wait until the next morning and see if the plants are still drooping; if they are, then they water.

Reprinted from The Texas Sage, October 1998

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 fourth Thursday of the month at 8:30 am during the summer, 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.

Molly Hollar Wildscape at Veterans Park *John Dycus*

Welcome back from vacation, Molly Hollar, who took off for Colorado because “we senior citizens must be careful not to risk getting overheated in case August should revert back to normal.” As if any of us at Veterans Park could outwork the Wonder of the Wildscape, regardless of the weather. The Olympics, just completed, should have a competition in long-term nurturing. They could call it the 100-mile Molly.

And what did happen to the dog days of July and August with their overheated afternoons? Our very unusual cool, rainy—delightful—summer has kept the wildscape volunteers enthusiastic and the native plants verdant. That enthusiasm poured forth in July as the volunteers attacked the fire ants with the recommended drench, cut down the unwanted plants and added compost at the prairie site adopted by Jan Miller.

Weeds and Bermuda grass have proliferated, but your weed warriors have risen to the challenge. Pat Lovejoy led a squadron of eradicators at the August workday, enhancing the sunny butterfly garden while it was still cool, eliminating any undesirables (plants, not people!) brazen enough to reappear. As it got hotter, the team moved to the shade and continued the battle all along the northern sidewalk for about 6 feet back. (The poison ivy had been removed to maintain the volunteers’ enthusiasm.)

Now the walkers, joggers, cyclers and skaters can enjoy the weedless plantings of red salvia coccinea and turk’s cap along with the hummingbirds, admire the beautyberry and coralberry sought after by the songbirds, and watch the butterflies and hummingbirds nectaring on the lantana and zexmenia as they make their way along this major sidewalk.

During the July and August Tuesday workdays and Friday propagation days, volunteers from Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, the Native Plant Society, Arlington Conservation

legs. Now that’s entertainment. And at no charge to wildscape volunteers!

Back indoors, Glenn Troutman, president of the West Sector (WECAN) and a member of the Arlington Parks

Board, continues to keep things running smoothly at the greenhouse on Wednesdays. He lifts and mixes the heavy sacks of soil, moves plants around as needed and does whatever he can to make the tasks more tempting for the propagation volunteers. In turn, they’ve been busy preparing for the September 25 native plant sale benefitting the wildscape.

After propagating

more than \$6,000 worth of plants, the focus is now on the fall sale. Most of the seed and cuttings come from local plants, which are perfectly adapted to the local weather and soil. Other plants are rescued from the bulldozer’s path. Enough are grown to put out in the wildscape, and the remainder are sold to benefit the work. Thanks to the Arlington Parks Department for use of the greenhouse.

Fall, incidentally, is the ideal time to plant in Texas because of the summers. In response to the cooler, wetter weather, plants shoot their roots deeper in preparation for the inevitable hot-and-dry. With spring planting, the plants must be tended much more carefully to ensure they survive their first summer.



Council and park passers-by have planted turk’s cap, violet ruellia, frogfruit, horseherb, lantana, salvia coccinea and columbine to add color and attract wildlife. More color has come from the Giant Swallowtails and Tiger Swallowtails as they seemingly float through the air. Birds chase the Eastern Black Swallowtails, and the Giant Sulphurs have been spotted rushing to and fro. Gulf Fritillaries lay their eggs on the passionvine, and the recently planted Hercules Club trees behind the pavilion have a new crop of swallowtail caterpillars.

Hummingbirds add amazing speed and motion as they hover at the coral honeysuckle, turk’s cap and salvia coccinea. Mockingbirds feast from the beautyberry and add their songs to the cardinals’ and wrens’, with the squirrels’ chatter joining in. Rabbits scurry down the trails, and a toad was recently seen emerging from the pond covered in duckweed, comically resembling a green jumping plant with



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

Next Meeting

Thursday, October 7
 Fort Worth Botanic Gardens

6:00

Xeriscape Garden Tour

7:00

Annual Plant Swap

Visit us on the Web at
www.txnativeplants.org

Join the Native Plant Society of Texas!

We invite you to become 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
 512-868-8799 or 512-931-1166

<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$15	<input type="checkbox"/> Group	\$35
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen	\$15	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$50
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$20	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$100
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e-mail: _____

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For changes of address or information about contributing to the newsletter, please contact the newsletter editor.

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