



THE TEXAS SAGE

Native Plant Society of Texas, North Central Chapter Newsletter
Volume 17, Number 5
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The President's Corner *Pat Lovejoy*



Members and Friends,

Our May meeting was terrific, with over 100 members and guests present. My special thanks to Taylor Stephens-Parker who arranged our Smart Start workshop with Rosa Finsley. Also, thanks to Devanie Fergus who handles our raffle each week; to Donna Morris who handles our refreshments; to Jan Miller for selling the books, and to ALL who help with our meetings. Thanks to Rosa Finsley for everything she does to help us spread the word on natives.

We continue to spread the word via our outreach. This month, Carol Wester helped at Buffalo Boogie, Cary and Beth Hardin and the other Decatur members passed out our recommended plant list at the dedication of the new Heritage Wildscape Park in Decatur, and many of our members helped with the plant sale at the Molly Hollar Wildscape. Thanks to all of you!

For the last two weeks, I have watched my neighbor use a tiller under his oak trees preparing to lay SOD! I couldn't stand it any longer. As your President and a true believer in spreading the word on natives, I marched over and asked if I could give him some alternatives to "all that grass"! He has often admired my wonderful native landscape and asked for a tour of the backyard. I figured now was the time. I gave him a tour and introduced him to the beautyberry, inland sea oats, coralberry, columbine, lyreleaf and cedar sages, agarita, aromatic sumac, wood violets, etc., etc., etc. that grow under the trees in my yard. I have just about eliminated all the grass in my backyard in favor of mulch paths and native plants. I've discovered over the last five years, grass doesn't grow well under trees and requires a lot more water than the post oaks don't like.

I also introduced him to lasagna layering as an alternative to making beds rather than tilling. After our tour, he assured me he was going to keep the grass to a minimum and would be happy to work with me in planting a native landscape in his yard. He has lasagna layered his first bed and will be planting it soon. Of course, I will be passing along as many plants as I can. Not only will this enhance my yard but add one more yard in the neighborhood with natives.

I hope you will join us at the Molly Hollar Wildscape for the final part of our workshop. Not only will we be able to see all the wonderful work Molly and her volunteers have done in the past ten years, we will be able to see many of the things Rosa talked about at our workshop.

In the meanwhile as we ponder the use of natives in our landscapes, remember what Rosa said. Ask yourself: How do we want to use the space? What do we need in our yard? What can our yard do for us?

See you in June,

Pat

June meeting: Thursday, June 9, 6:30 pm, Molly Hollar Wildscape, Veterans Park, Arlington

Please join us for part three of our Smart Start Your Yard with Natives workshop with Rosa Finsley, well known Texas Native Landscape Architect. We will enjoy a leisurely tour of the wildscape with Rosa Finsley as the final part of our workshop. Veterans Park is located at Arkansas Lane and Spanish Trail. Park in the second lot on Spanish Trail. For more information call Taylor Stephens-Parker, 817-784-6003 or soil-nurse@sbcglobal.net.

Backyard Bullies: Good Plants Gone Bad *Doreen Cubie*

(Reprinted with permission from National Wildlife Federation's Habitats, Spring 2005)

When tamarisk was first brought to the United States from the shores of the Mediterranean in the 1800s, gardeners snapped up this ornamental tree for its feathery, needlelike leaves and dainty pink flowers. Its deep roots also made it a seemingly ideal plant for riverbank stabilization. Today, however, tamarisk, or salt cedar as it's often called, is an ecological nightmare. It blankets 1.2 million acres of the arid Southwest, where it is sucking up excessive amounts of water, pushing out natives and altering riparian or streamside habitat.

What makes a good plant go bad? In many parts of the world tamarisk is a treasured tree. But when introduced into a new environment, tamarisk became invasive, growing rapidly and outcompeting its neighbors. This frequently happens when a plant is taken out of its native habitat, because it leaves behind the complex array of natural controls that held it in check.

About 1,100 plant species are now considered to be invasive in the United States, according to the Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group. Some of these plants—such as tamarisk, purple loosestrife, and Norway maple—can drastically change their new environment. When this happens, not only do native plants lose out, but so do birds and other wildlife.

In one study along the lower Colorado River, for example, biologists discovered tamarisk groves supported less than ten percent of the winter bird life found in nearby stands of native trees. When purple loosestrife—a Eurasian aquatic—takes over a Midwestern marsh, it chokes out native rushes and sedges, causing ducks and other waterfowl to lose both food and nesting habitat. Norway maples, which are spreading along streams in the Appalachians and the Northern Rockies, produce a chemical that inhibits the growth of any other type of plant beneath their canopy.

Ornamentals that are harmful to our environment are still sold in many garden centers. Some of these plants, such as Japanese barberry, are even widely promoted by the nursery trade. This Asian exotic, which is a thorny deciduous shrub, has now escaped into the wild from Maine to Georgia and as far west as Wyoming. When unchecked by gardeners, Japanese barberry forms impenetrable thickets that exclude nearly all native plants and also create a physical barrier to wildlife.

The financial cost of these alien plants is staggering. In the United States, for example, over \$100 million a year is spent fighting aquatic invasives. Our national parks also expend precious money and resources to keep nonnatives from taking over. In Great Smoky Mountains National Park, one of the most aggressive species is the mimosa, or silk tree. During the last decade, workers have cut down thousands of these flowering trees from just one river drainage. Unfortunately, it's often difficult to predict ahead of time which exotic plants will turn into outlaws. The best course of action: Garden as much as possible with trees, shrubs, perennials and vines that are native to your area. If you do decide to plant nonnatives, studies have shown that hybrids rarely become invasive. Another option is to use species from different regions of the United States. More than 95 percent of North America's invasive plants have been brought here from other countries.

Whatever you do, give careful thought to what you are putting in your backyard habitat. By checking to see whether a species has the potential to become invasive before you plant it, you can do your part to protect local wildlife as well as America's biological heritage.

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Outreach

The Arlington Organic Garden's 10th annual Natural Urban Living Garden Show is Saturday, June 18, at Bob Duncan Community Center. There is a lot of activity packed in between the hours of 9:00 am and 5:00 pm, but a few volunteers are all we need for the day. It is a fun show in a cool air-conditioned building with close, hassle-free parking. A volunteers-only potluck style lunch sets this show apart. There is some serious food. Call if you'd like to help NPSOT and even if you cannot work our table, come out for a look at the plants and materials for sale.

Super volunteer Carol Wester handled NPSOT's Buffalo Boogie booth on May 7 at the Fort Worth Nature Center. Weston Gardens, at Carol's request, donated plants for the event. Anyone living in an outlying area with local show venues is encouraged to enter on behalf of our NPSOT chapter. Pat and Evaline organized and set up a Johnson County Master Gardeners' show booth this spring. Our club needs more activity like that. Membership must continue to grow and you can help that happen on the local level. Contact me for information on how you can be set up.

Don't forget the Fall NPSOT Symposium in Big Bend, October 20-23, 2005

The Big Bend NPSOT chapter has many wonderful activities planned. Make your hotel reservations soon as rooms are going fast! Check the NPSOT website or the next state newsletter for more details.

Molly Hollar Wildscape at Veterans Park *Molly Hollar and John Dycus*

Excitement is where you find it, and there was plenty to be found in April at the wildscape. Pat Lovejoy and her volunteer crew started the month off right by banishing weeds from the butterfly garden, and they made good progress as they continued weeding on down the hill.

The birdbath in the pavilion will soon be trickling happily across the boulder and into the depression. Thanks, Anne Alderfer, for your pond skills, and thanks, Rosa Finsley, for donating a huge water tank. Since the parks water is turned off during cold spells and at night to avoid vandalism, the uphill tank will gravity-feed to the birdbath. Water is the most important need for wildlife, especially birds, so expect to see more birds drinking and bathing in front of the pavilion soon.

More excitement. On April 28, Rosa met her stone foreman at the wildscape to instruct him in repairing the bridge over the creek, setting boulders next to the pavilion boardwalk and repairing the boulder birdbath. And the spring native plant sale snared an astounding \$5,000 to benefit the wildscape. And Arlington Parks & Rec has agreed to connect the original wildscape pond to the irrigation system so the pond gets a boost every time the sprinklers come on. This is Rosa's ingenious low-tech solution since there's not enough electricity to run even a small pump to maintain the water level. Soon all the water features will be working, the bridge will be functioning again, and new boulders will be in place.

The last workday was remarkable, as several groups came together to accomplish many things. Synergy, I believe it's called. Parks & Rec folks and volunteers from Denece Newsom's Sam Houston High School science class were making gabions (rock enclosed in cyclone fencing) to place in eroded channels to slow runoff, and they were shorthanded. They asked Molly Hollar for help—no extra wildscape volunteers were available, she reported—and magically, at that moment, Mike Warren of Tarrant County Juvenile Services appeared with a group of kids ready to go to work.

As they began loading the rock into wheelbarrows, someone said pictures would be nice. Nearby, AISD teacher Suzanne Dudek was taking photos and told Molly that she would like to start a wildscape in her school. Suzanne agreed to take pictures of the young people making gabions, and Molly told her of the wildscape volunteer, another AISD teacher, who had been awarded a grant to start such a garden at her school. Then guess who walked up? Carrie Donovan, the teacher Molly had told Suzanne about!

It gets better. Next, one of the science teachers asked Molly to talk to the kids about biology and ecology, to help them on their TAKS tests. Molly is neither a biologist nor a botanist, but just then, magically (did we say that before?), another wildscape volunteer, Dawn Hancock—a retired biology teacher—walked up and agreed to do the job, saying she had been TAKS tutoring all week.

And with that, someone told Molly, "With your luck today, you should go buy a lottery ticket."

Even after the regular enthusiasts, Northrop-Grumman volunteers and parks department workers spent hours removing wildscape privet, a noxious spread of Satan's ground cover remained. So the parks department came to the rescue, as it often does, and provided crews to pull about 95 percent of the remaining privet. Privet is an invasive weed (thug) from Asia, where the cold keeps it in balance. In a warmer climate like Texas, it rivals kudzu vine in taking over. Left alone, it will kill everything except poison ivy, leaving only a monoculture of privet. First to go are the wildflowers and understory, then the lovely blooming understory trees, and finally even the shade trees. Usurping all the light and water prevents the continuing germination of seed and acorns needed to sustain the woodland. Now that the privet is gone, the volunteers will continue to plant more of the hundreds of understory trees that have been rescued and many dozens donated by volunteer Shirley Craig and others from their own properties.

Special raffle thanks to:

Designs in Nature for the Texas persimmon
Green Mamas Gardens for the gift certificate
Redenta's Gardens for the gift certificate
Stuart's Nursery, Weatherford, for the Texas betony

We appreciate your continued support.

And more thanks for May raffle items to:

Gailon's Gardens for the desert willow
Molly Hollar for the Carolina buckthorns
Dagmar Higgins for the red *Salvia greggii*
Stephen Hayden for the rosemary and holly ferns
Dixie Livermore for native verbena and three-leaf sumac

Thanks also to all of you who *bought* a ticket. This helps us cover our meeting room expenses.

Next Meeting

Thursday, June 9

6:30 pm

Molly Hollar Wildscape
Veterans Park, Arlington

Rosa Finsley
Native Landscape Architect

Special Workshop

Concludes:

**Smart Start Your Yard
with Natives**

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

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