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# N P S O T

# North Central Texas News

Native Plant Society of Texas, North Central Chapter Newsletter  
Volume 19, Number 4 June 2007

## The President's Corner John Bridges

Greetings, North Central Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas.

So, is the drought over or not? The average length of time between major droughts in Texas is 30 years. The only 2 rare things about this past drought is the fact that it was 25 years late and that we had 2 extremely wet years in the middle of it. Other than that, it is the same old thing that Texans have had to deal with throughout time. The same old thing that Texans will surely face again.

In 2060, Texas should be going through its 3<sup>rd</sup> normal multiyear drought of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet by then our state's population will have swelled from 20.9 million to 45.6 million.

North Central Texas will double in population in the next 40 years. It only takes 20 minutes for our Tarrant County's population to grow by another person. Tarrant County's additional water demand is growing by 8.5 gallons every minute.

I'm grateful for our water districts, whose long-term planning has made it possible to water our yards during this drought. Yet that extra cost to water St. Augustine is massive. I also understand that this story would be very different if not for the pure luck of two extremely wet years on each side of 2003. We could have easily lost all of the non-native landscaping in North Central Texas.

Lower Bois d'Arc Creek, Ralph Hall, Marvin Nichols and Lake Fastrill are the names of the 4 major reservoirs being planned just for our water district through 2060. District C is our local water district, and it is made up of 16 North Central Texas counties.

These reservoirs are just part of what you're going to pay for while trying to keep up our water supply. By the way,

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**June meeting: Thursday, June 7, 7:00 pm,  
Fort Worth Botanic Gardens, Deborah Beggs Moncrief  
Garden Center, Orchid Room**

**Newsletter editor John Darling will present "Our birds and their plants." It's a bird-centric view of native plant landscaping, so if you're a bird (or a birdophile), you might enjoy it.**

## The President's Corner continued from page 1

those half-million acres that our district will flood have fellow Texans already living on them and calling them their homes. We will force them to move while only paying them tax value for their homes. Please understand that we do this mainly to grow non-adapted plants that don't belong here in the first place.

How many reservoirs can we buy for Texas? Texans have paid for building every lake in the state except Lake Caddo, which is our only natural lake. All other reservoirs are man-made and citizen funded.

Is building more lakes our only choice? Is building more lakes our best choice?

Or maybe we should rethink this water thing. Is there any other way that we could have green landscapes with colorful gardens? YES, they are called native plants.

Our recommended plant list has 78 different drought-tolerate plants that love full sun. With the use of such plants we can reduce our summer watering needs from 3 inches every 15 days to an average of 3 inches for the year.

Several members have yards that look drop-dead gorgeous and were only watered with around 7 inches of extra water during last year's drought.

Most of us will never reach the point where we

only water 3 inches a year. Yet all of us can use that as a goal and have several native beds that only get 1 inch of water a month. If you get an inch of water from rain, you don't water that month.

What is the hardest thing to overcome while trying to reach that 3-inch goal? The habit of landscaping predominately with grass turf and wanting it to be green even in August is completely unsustainable. Any turf grasses that stay green through our summers are water hogs.

Don't give up. Just understand that a green turf takes a huge amount more of water and work than a garden full of drought-tolerant native plants.

That little extra money you spend on native plants will more than repay their cost the very first year after they get established. Then the savings from reduced water, fertilizer and pesticides will keep saving you money year after year.

Want to save even more money? Make a native bed somewhere that you now have grass. Or just extend a bed with natives out into where you now have grass. Isn't there any spot that is now turf that could be converted to ground cover like frogfruit or golden groundsel. If we take baby steps, we can gradually move toward sustainable water use.

John Bridges



## Show Us Your Yard

Taylor Stephens-Parker lives in a beautiful residential neighborhood with traditional landscaping of burford hollies, St Augustine grass and crape myrtles. However, it's Taylor's yard the butterflies, dragonflies and birds visit.

Do you have a favorite native plant spot in your yard that you'd like to share? Please do. Just send it to the editor at the address on the last page and we'll do our best to show it off to an audience that just can't get enough looks at natives.

Maybe your photo will inspire a member to try something that's worked well for you. To help them along, please include as much (or as little) information as you'd like. Thanks.



## This Month's Plant Becca Dickson, Trinity Forks NPSOT member

(This month we feature the Operation NICE Plant of the season)

### Perennial: Mexican-Hat (*Ratibida columnifera*)

**Description:** *Ratibida columnifera* goes by several names: Mexican-Hat, Upright Prairie Coneflower, Long-headed Coneflower, and Thimble-Flower. This prairie perennial grows over most of the US, including our region. Mexican-Hat will usually grow 1 to 3 feet tall. It has a branching growth pattern, with deeply lobed leaves 2 inches wide and up to 6 inches long.

**Blooms:** Mexican-Hat blooms from May through July with occasional flowers later in the summer. The flowers resemble sombreros, giving Mexican-Hat its most common name. The flower petals range in color from solid yellow to red with a splash of yellow to reddish-brown. In both types, the petals surround an upright 1- to 2-inch brownish cone that develops seeds.

**Planting sites:** Mexican-Hat should be planted in full sun to light shade in well-drained soil. It tolerates a range of soil pH, from weakly acidic to moderately alkaline. It will grow well in sandy loam, loam, or clay-based soil. Plants should be spaced 2-3 feet apart. Mexican-Hat seeds can be planted in the early spring or in the fall.

**Watering Instructions:** Mexican-Hat should be watered well immediately after planting and then every other week during the first growing season.



Variation in Mexican-Hat flower petal color. Photos by Lon Turnbull, Marilyn Blanton, Kathy Saucier (left to right)

Like most native plants, Mexican-Hat should not be over-watered and should not be planted where it might experience "wet feet." After the first growing season, Mexican-Hat is very drought tolerant and should survive with existing rainfall.

**Comments:** Mexican-Hat is a stalwart of our prairies and deserving of a place in our gardens. It does very well in the heat of a Texas summer and can also withstand high humidity. It will slowly spread and performs well in average to poor soil, making it well-suited for North Texas xeriscapes. It can be propagated from plantlets that grow on the main branches of a parent plant. Mexican-Hat keeps a green foliage rosette during our mild winters and during the summer makes a nice cut flower for bouquets.

## SW Subcourthouse Gailon Hardin

Because I was out of town I was unable to attend the last SW subcourthouse workday. Marilyn Salee notified me of the recent storm damage and told me our next workday would be a challenge. The heavy rains washed mulch out of the beds, over the paths and sidewalks, and erosion gullies were in several of the pathways. Also, a water box cover near the sidewalk was MIA. She commented that the aromatic sumac was not leafing out, but that the gaura and winecups were magnificent and the ruellia was dense!

Pat Lovejoy was the attending project manager for the following workday. She said many people stopped and chatted while they voted at the courthouse. Terry Schmidt MN scraped up the decomposed granite and mulch that washed out, and Carol Norfleet, Earl Alexander, Emily Beyette, Sue

Ellen Schnitzer and spouse pulled LOTS of weeds. She agreed with Marilyn that the aromatic sumac doesn't look good but remembered the same thing last year and it came back wonderfully. Pat's concern is that the upright *Ruellia humilis* is taking over the hell strip and seep muhly can't be seen. She also observed that the *Salvia greggii*, coneflower, and *Zexmenia* were absolutely beautiful, and the blackfoot daisies are making a comeback.

If you would like to learn how to plant and maintain native plants, volunteering at one of our demonstration gardens is just the way. Our workdays in June at the SWC will be June 9 and 27. Mulch will be available the 9<sup>th</sup>, so please bring a wheelbarrow and help us spread.

## The Molly Hollar Wildscape John Dycus

Pimping for the possumhaw, shilling for the shrubs. Didn't we have a grand time with Earth Day at the Wildscape. Pick a goal for the event, and I think we met it.

Copious and content volunteers? Check. Almost 70 of them. From high school students to seasoned wildscape workers, we weren't hurting for help.

Broad-based community support? Check. Close to 100 people came out for the guided tour or just to mingle, or both. Young couples, older couples, families, children in strollers. Didn't see a frown. Not one.

Folks who can make a difference heard the message? Check. City Council members Kathryn Wilemon and Lana Wolff did the full experience. We appreciate their interest.

Shared useful information? Check. NPSOT's John Bridges on invasive plants was a hit, as was Anne Alderfer on wild-scaping. Bob Smith and his stately falcon engaged visitors from underneath a tall shade tree, while Julia Burgen captivated with her bird sounds and bird's nest collection. Jan Miller and Bill Lawrence praised our pocket prairie, and Parks and Wildlife's John Davis kicked off the grand tour. And the Native Plant Society of Texas handed out great information.

Kids had a good time? Did they ever. Check. Tiny tots with their face-painted cheeks all aglow, and all that. And making seed balls proved quite the thing to do.

No jockeying for space with the disc golfers? Check. A disc golf club official made a point to meet ACC beacon John Darling and pledge a little peace in the valley. The golfers even had a tournament that day, but there was plenty of park land (parking, too) to go around.

Follow-through publicity? Check. *Star-Telegram* coverage ran on page 1 of the Arlington section. Thanks, Cynthia Neff and Aaron Lambert, for the words and picture.

Hats off to everyone who made Earth Day at the Wildscape such a treat.

It was almost enough fun that we should do it every weekend. Almost.



*Clockwise from upper left: Visitors were treated to lots of wildscaping information. John Davis (Texas Parks & Wildlife Urban Biologist) started off the grand tour. Fort Worth Audubon added considerable interest with a peregrine falcon. Master Naturalist Bill Lawrence discussed our pocket prairie. Native Plant Society President John Bridges warned visitors about invasive exotic plants. ACC's recycling game was a hit. Julia Burgen entertained kids with her bird sounds and nature collection.*



## Plants and Dogs Gailon Hardin

Recently, my puppy Sumac had a difficult time with a stomach disorder and severe dehydration. So difficult that we went to the emergency vet twice in a 24 hour period—on a weekend. The name of the clinic was “Expensive,” you know what I mean. After several x-rays, tests, and \$600, the vet said there was nothing in the stomach or intestines, no obstruction of any kind.

Later I got *The Pet Owner’s Guide to Toxic Plants* from Lucy Harrell. It listed many poisonous plants that are commonly found in pet-owner’s yards. I had about 30% in my back yard. If you would like a copy you can write to Scent-off, PO Box 530146, St. Petersburg, FL 33747-0146. Below I’ve listed a few of the plants mentioned on the list.

Common name	Scientific name	toxicity
Aloe vera	<i>Aloe</i>	minimal
Amaryllis	<i>Hippeastrum</i>	extreme
Asparagus fern	<i>Asparagus officinalis</i>	moderate
Bleeding heart	<i>Dicentra spectabilis</i>	moderate
Bluebonnet	<i>Lupinus texensis</i>	extreme
Burning bush	<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>	moderate
Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus</i>	minimal
Caladium	<i>Caladium</i>	moderate
Calla lily	<i>Zantedeschia</i>	minimal
Castor bean	<i>Ricinus</i>	extreme
Christmas rose	<i>Helleborus niger</i>	minimal
Chrysanthemum	<i>Chrysanthemum</i>	minimal
Croton	<i>Croton tiglium</i>	moderate
Daffodil	<i>Narcissus</i>	extreme
Elephant ear	<i>Colocasia</i>	minimal
English ivy	<i>Hedera</i>	extreme
Foxglove	<i>Digitalis</i>	extreme
Crocus	<i>Colchicum</i>	extreme
Hemlock	<i>Conium</i>	extreme
Hyacinth	<i>Hyacinthus</i>	minimal



A new low in NPSOT newsletter history: As promised, here’s Gailon’s dog. I hope you’re happy, Ms Hardin—Ed.



This is more like it: poisonous bluebonnets at Arlington’s New York Avenue Prairie.



Buttercup from the USDA Plants Database.

### Next Meeting

Thursday, June 7  
7:00 pm  
Fort Worth  
Botanic Gardens

John Darling:

Our Birds and  
Their Plants

Visit us on the Web  
at  
[www.txnativeplants.org](http://www.txnativeplants.org)

### Join the Native Plant Society of Texas!

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 with the appropriate remittance to:

Native Plant Society of Texas  
PO Box 3017, Fredricksburg, TX 78624  
830-997-9272

_____ Student	\$15	_____ Couple/Family	\$40
_____ Senior Individual		_____ Group	\$50
(65+)	\$20	_____ Patron	\$100
_____ Senior Couple		_____ Benefactor	\$250
(one 65+)	\$30	_____ Supporting	\$500
_____ Individual	\$25	_____ Corporate Sponsor	\$1000
		_____ Lifetime	\$1000

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 County: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chapter Affiliation: North Central Chapter  
 e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### The North Central Texas NPSOT News

is a monthly publication of the North Central Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas.

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

The deadline for submitting articles for inclusion in next month's newsletter is the 15th of every month.

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