



San Antonio Natural Areas

A Guide to Interesting Plants



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
PARKS & RECREATION

Agarita (*Mahonia trifoliolata*)

Bloom Time: Late February through March

Fun Fact: The stamens are reported to be touch sensitive; when touched by a pollinating insect, they spring out throwing pollen onto the pollinator.

Cultural Connection: In Springtime, Agarita produces a vibrant red, tart fruit that makes delicious pies, jellies, and cobblers. Few Native American groups consumed the fruit. However, the alkaloids in the roots have medicinal benefits used to treat ailments such as upset stomach, wounds, skin problems, gum disease, stiffness of joints, and scorpion bites. Moreover, the color yellow was extracted from the bark and used by indigenous groups to dye basketry and buckskin, and used as face paint for ceremonial purposes.



© Ray Mathews

Wildlife Use: Songbirds eat the fruit. Quail and small mammals use the plant for cover. Considered a good source of pollen for honey.

Larval Host: None

Bluewood Condalia (*Condalia hookeri*)

Bloom Time: Summer through September

Fun Fact: The dense heartwood is a brilliant red color and has been used to make ornamental objects.

Cultural Connection: The fruit of this tree range in color from green to red to black, and are ripe in the summer. Sweet and edible, the fruit makes a good jelly and wine, but is sometimes hard to source since it is a favorite of birds and other wildlife. Bluewood Condalia gets its common name from the blue dye that's obtained from the wood. The wood burns with an intense heat and is also valued as a fuel.



© Ray Mathews

Wildlife Use: Good wildlife habitat. The fruit are eaten by fox, raccoon, and various birds. This plant also provides cover, nesting sites, and food for insects.

Larval Host: Tamaulipan agapema moth

Sugar Hackberry

(*Celtis laevigata*)

Bloom Time: March through April

Fun Fact: The large “warty” looking bumps on the tree trunks are by no means an accident. This is an adaptation that protects the thin bark of the tree from being damaged by large mammals such as deer rubbing their antlers on the bark.

Cultural Connection: Used as food, medicine, fiber and dye, Hackberry trees have sustained populations for thousands of years. Hackberry fruit are rich in sugar and calcium and when pounded to make a pulp, they can be dried and mixed with other foods. The Comanche mixed the berries with fat and rolled them into balls, then roasted them over a fire.



© Carl Fabre

Wildlife Use: At least ten species of birds including robins, mockingbirds, and other songbirds eat the fruit.

Larval Host: Hackberry Emperor and American Snout

Little Bluestem

(*Schizachyrium scoparium*)

Bloom Time: August through December

Fun Fact: One of our most important native grasses, Little Bluestem is often a vegetational dominant, and one of the “big four” tall grass prairie species.

Cultural Connection: Before the arrival of Europeans, a sea of grassland existed across the Great Plains, however, after European settlement of the prairie, it was a dramatically different landscape. Tall grass prairies have decreased by an estimated 90% through fire cessation, cattle grazing, barbed wire fencing, and modern agricultural practices. Little Bluestem is one of the four major grasses of the tall grass prairie and prized by birds and other wildlife, and especially palatable to bison, which once had a population between twenty and forty million.



© Sam C. Strickland

Wildlife Use: Favored by grazers, provides cover, nesting material, and seeds for small mammals and granivorous birds.

Larval Host: Ottoe Skipper, Indian Skipper, Crossline Skipper, Dusted Skipper, Cobweb Butterfly, and Dixie Skipper

Frostweed

(*Verbesina virginica*)

Bloom Time: August through October

Fun Fact: When exposed to the first freezing temperatures of the year, the stems split and exude a sap which freezes into fascinating shapes.

Cultural Connection: Leaves are said to have been dried and used as a tobacco substitute by both Native Americans and Mexicans, hence its common name, Indian Tobacco. Different parts of the plant were used to ease gastrointestinal symptoms, mainly as a laxative, and help with urinary tract and eye ailments. The root is also pounded and then soaked in water for a few hours, and the extract is used to treat fevers.



© Myra B. Allison

Wildlife Use: Provides nectar to numerous insects including Pipevine Butterflies, Monarchs and Great Purple Hairstreaks to name a few.

Larval Host: Silvery Checkerspot

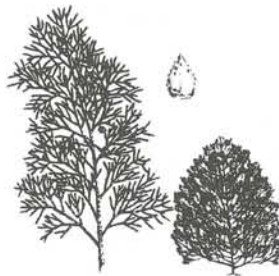
Ashe Juniper

(*Juniperus ashei*)

Bloom Time: December through February

Fun Fact: The three species of Juniper in Texas are dioecious, meaning the pollen and seed cones are on separate trees.

Cultural Connection: Ashe Juniper, or as it's locally called, "Cedar", was an important tree for native populations. The wood and bark were used as fuel and tool making, and the blue Juniper berries (or cones) on the female tree were used for medicine and ritual purposes. Native Americans also used the berries to flavor meat and stews. In addition, the smashed Juniper berries can be used to repel mosquitoes since they contain insecticidal properties. Cedar wood oil is shipped all over the world to scent soaps, perfumes, room sprays, and cosmetics.



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Wildlife Use: Ashe Juniper berries are highly palatable to many species of birds and mammals. The bark of Ashe Juniper is used for nesting material by the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler.

Larval Host: Juniper Hairstreak and Olive Butterfly

Plateau Live Oak

(*Quercus fusiformis*)

Bloom Time: March through May

Fun Fact: Live oaks form mottes of genetically identical individuals grafted together through intricate root systems.

Cultural Connection: Acorns from Plateau Live Oak trees (and others Oaks) were an important food source for Native Americans as they contain fiber, fat, protein, and carbohydrates. Some native groups made acorn meal from the endosperm, or “nutmeat” by pulverizing the nutmeat, and leaching or rinsing until the bitterness was gone. The acorn meal can be used as a flour or baked in an earthen oven, yielding a tasty pancake with a nutty flavor. Oak bark is also a source for tannin (a type of astringent) and can be used as a skin wash that reduces irritations.



© Sally and Andy Wasowski

Wildlife Use: It provides cover and nesting sites for birds and small mammals. Its acorns feed birds and mammals.

Larval Host: Hairstreak and Horace's Duskywing

Honey Mesquite

(*Prosopis glandulosa*)

Bloom Time: February through September

Fun Fact: Some studies show soil nitrogen to be three to seven times higher beneath Mesquite canopies versus in open spaces between Mesquite.

Cultural Connection: The Mesquite-bean pod was a staple in the Native American diet. The pods were ground into a type of flour and made into bread or mixed with water to form a sweet, nutritious atole, which, when fermented, produced a weak beer. Native American women used Mesquite bark to make diapers, skirts, and other articles of clothing. They also wove baskets, ropes, and twine from Mesquite fibers. Mesquite bark was also used to make a poultice for treating wounds and illnesses, and the gum exuded from Mesquite trunks was used as candy, as a glue for mending pottery, and as a black dye.



© Joseph A. Marcus

Wildlife Use: An excellent source of nectar, cover, and fruit for wildlife.

Larval Host: Reickers Blue Butterfly and Long-tailed Skipper

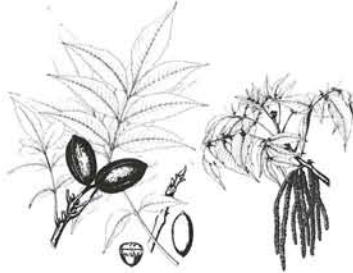
Pecan

(*Carya illinoensis*)

Bloom Time: March through May

Fun Fact: Pecan is one of the most valuable cultivated plants originating in North America.

Cultural Connection: Pecan stands of South Texas were a regular stop for hunters and gatherers groups during winter. The “meat” of each nut is an important high energy food source as it’s comprised of nineteen vitamins and minerals, yielding important carbohydrates, lipids, protein, and more. The first European to observe the use of Pecan nuts was Cabeza de Vaca during the early 16th century: “They grind up some little grains with them, two months of the year, without eating anything else, and even this they do not have every year, because one year they bear, and the next they do not.”



© R. W. Smith

Wildlife Use: Pecan trees provide excellent fruit for mammals and birds. The substrate found under Pecan provides prime hunting for insectivorous birds.

Larval Host: Gray Hairstreak

Texas Mountain Laurel

(*Sophora secundiflora*)

Bloom Time: February through March

Fun Fact: The flowers and bright red seeds (mescal beans) are poisonous to humans; one seed is reported to be enough to cause fatal poisoning.

Cultural Connection: Historically, mescal beans were used by Native Americans as a hallucinogen for ceremonial purposes. The seeds are also said to bring good luck and strings of them were often traded, while others were used to adorn clothing, worn as jewelry, or to decorate warrior dolls.

Wildlife Use: An excellent source of nectar for pollinators.

Larval Host: Henry’s Elfin



© Ray Mathews

Texas Persimmon

(*Diospyros texana*)

Bloom Time: March through April

Fun Fact: The largest persimmon, located in Uvalde County, is 26 feet tall with a trunk circumference of 67 inches.

Cultural Connection: Persimmon fruit were used as a black dye by Native Americans, and is still used as a dye for leather in Mexico today. The strong heartwood of the tree is used for furniture, piano keys, and fine carvings, such as tool handles. The heartwood, found in very large trunks, is black, like that of the related ebony (*Diospyros ebenum*). The fruit are very acidic. The Cherokee were said to eat the raw fruit and also used it as an astringent for treating sores in the throat and mouth. In addition, it was used for treating hemorrhoids, and the bark was chewed to treat heartburn. In Spanish, the tree is known as chapote, a word derived from the Nahuatl word tzapotl, meaning fruit-bearing tree.



© Ray Mathews

Wildlife Use: Fruit attracts birds and mammals, especially deer and peccary. Inconspicuous flowers attract pollinators.

Larval Host: Gray Hairstreak and Henrys Elfin Butterfly

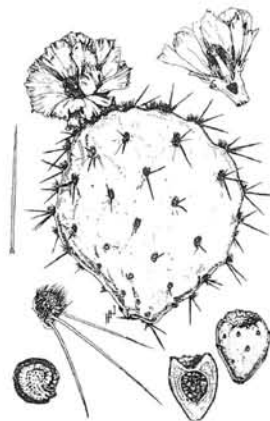
Texas Prickly Pear

(*Opuntia engelmannii* var. *lindheimeri*)

Bloom Time: May through June

Fun Fact: The long sharp spines are actually modified leaves that harden with age.

Cultural Connection: The Prickly Pear cactus can store water in its fleshy pads, and when cut open they yield a soothing poultice for wounds. The fruit are called tuna and turn red when ripe, and can be made into jelly, wine, or syrup. Young pads, or nopalitos, can be boiled and served with eggs or eaten alone. Prickly Pear pads were also dried and stitched together by Native Americans to make bags for food collection and leaching acorns. Cactus pads may sometimes display clusters of white "fluff" called cochineal, a female insect used to make a beautiful deep crimson red dye. Cochineal was among the most valuable resource exported to Spain.



© Alan Cressler

Wildlife Use: Many birds, reptiles, and small mammals make their nests or dens in or beneath Prickly Pear plants. The fruit, seeds, and pads provide food for over forty species of wild animals.

Larval Host: Cactus Moth

Evergreen Sumac

(*Rhus virens*)

Bloom Time: August through October

Fun Fact: Although the name suggests otherwise, Evergreen Sumac is actually semi-evergreen, losing and replacing leaves in the winter.

Cultural Connection: A close relative of poison ivy and the mango tree, Evergreen Sumac was used for food and drink and was also an important component of the Native American pharmacopoeia (herbal medicines). The orange-red fruit were eaten and sometimes ground into meal or made into a beverage or soup. The Mescalero Apaches mixed baked agave with the Sumac fruit and dried the mixture for storage. They also used the fruit for jams and mixed it with sunflower seeds. The Comanche chewed the bark and swallowed the resulting juice to treat colds.



© Ray Mathews

Wildlife Use: Wildlife feed on the fuzzy red fruit. The flower is an important nectar source for pollinators since it blooms late in the year.

Larval Host: None

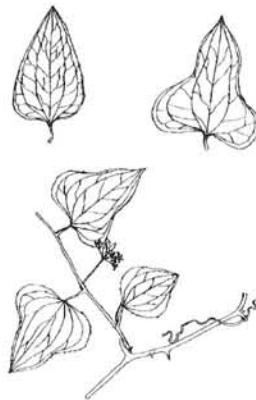
Saw Greenbriar

(*Smilax bona-nox*)

Bloom Time: April through May

Fun Fact: The specific epithet, '*bona-nox*', comes from the Spanish phrase, buenos noches meaning goodnight.

Cultural Connection: Native Americans in the Southeast found several uses for Greenbriar. While some groups admired Greenbriar for its medicinal quality, others rubbed moistened leaves on their skin to enhance youthfulness. Tea can be made from the leaves and stems which is said to treat rheumatism and stomach problems, and the root of the plant is used to treat urinary tracts problems. Additionally, the Comanche used the leaves as cigarette wrappers. The shoots (which often looks like a walking stick insect) are edible. The small bluish-black fruit can be found in clusters along the vine, and can be eaten raw or cooked (without seed).



© Alan Cressler

Wildlife Use: The fruit is eaten by wildlife and the new growth is a favorite of white-tailed deer.

Larval Host: None

Cedar Elm

(*Ulmus crassifolia*)

Bloom Time: July through October

Fun Fact: This tree is called Cedar Elm because of the rough, Cedar scale-like texture of the leaves and because it is often found in the western part of its range with Ashe Juniper (*Juniperus ashei*), which is locally called 'cedar'. The specific epithet '*crassifolia*' means 'thick leaf'.

Cultural Connection: Olmo, the Spanish term for Cedar Elm, is found throughout San Antonio and widespread throughout Northeast Texas. The wood is especially difficult to split therefore making it a poor firewood. However, some have used this fast-growing tree for tool handles and furniture since the wood is strong and said to be shock resistant. In addition, its fine grain bends well, so is used to make curved containers, boxes, crates, barrels and baskets. People have also used



© Nan Hampton

Wildlife Use: Often over-browsed where white-tailed deer are abundant. The seeds are eaten by birds and mammals.

Larval Host: Mourning Cloak, Question Mark, and Hop Merchant

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