



February 2021 Newsletter

Welcome to the Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas (FOSANA) e-newsletter! We share natural areas news, the Friends' efforts, and opportunities to get involved in volunteering or educational programs at San Antonio's natural areas parks. Please check our website, www.fosana.org, for periodic updates and program information.

Smilax: A Vine's Lovestory

Jayne Neal

February's association with Valentine's Day, love, and hearts dates back to the [Roman festival, Lupercalia](#), which occurred in mid-February and was the start of Roman springtime. The heart shape we recognize was first illustrated by the second-century Greek physician [Galen who asserted that the heart](#) was shaped like a pinecone.

The more traditional heart shape is also seen in nature, including on vegetation in the Natural Areas. One such plant that has a Valentine connection is greenbriar (*Smilax bona-nox*). According to Greek mythology, a young man was turned into a flower when he fell in love with [a nymph named Smilax](#), while Smilax was transformed into a vine.

Common names for *S. bona-nox* include catbrier, blaspheme-vine, and stretchberry. Look at the plant carefully and you will see it has prickles, usually more towards the bottom of the vine. Some have suggested that the lower level prickles serve as a defense against deer browse and also provide protection for small animals and birds. Get scratched by the prickly projections of the plant's dermal tissue, and you will understand the derivation of the common names catbrier and blaspheme-vine.

The name stretchberry is related to the rubbery texture of the plant's berries (Tull, Delena. 1987. *Edible and Useful Plants of Texas and the Southwest*). The [small black fruits are eaten](#) by wood ducks, ruffed grouse, wild turkeys, fish crows, black bears, opossums, raccoons, squirrels, and many species of songbirds.

Observe how greenbriar grows upward and note the tendril-bearing leaves. The tendrils wrap around their substrate and allow the plant to [reach heights of](#) more than 19 feet. As you walk in the Natural Areas this February, have a "lovely" time observing *S. bona-nox*.



Smilax leaves in winter
Photo: Jewell Lee Cozort



Smilax leaves spring to fall
Photo: [Weatherbie, Alden](#)

Employee Spotlight: Natural Areas Park Maintenance

At Friedrich Wilderness Park, there are 12 employees who manage three Natural Areas that are open to the public, including Friedrich, Eisenhower Park, and Crownridge Canyon Natural Area. Combined, these three Natural Areas encompass 1,100 acres of land. Without a doubt, it takes a dedicated team of employees to stay on top of the diverse needs of caring for our natural spaces. In addition to managing the land, visitors are always a priority. On any given day, staff could be working on sanitation such as washing the floors of the public restrooms, picking up trash in the picnic area, or removing graffiti. They also do trail work consisting of tree pruning, correcting drainage for water to run off the trails, or blocking illegal trails, and ensuring the continued safety of all park patrons.

Land management activities, however, are identified and prioritized by the Park Naturalist who has specific training in biological systems. Depending on the time of year, there may be any number of duties for maintenance staff to focus on such as Black-capped Vireo habitat restoration work at Friedrich Wilderness Park. This includes cutting and spraying deciduous regrowth to encourage these rare songbirds to nest at Friedrich once again. Staff also participates in grassland restoration work where they hand pull King Ranch Bluestem, thus encouraging native grasses to grow. At Eisenhower Park and Rancho Diana, maintenance assists with [Bracted Twistflower](#) habitat management where they clear out woody regrowth to encourage this rare sun loving wildflower to grow. The Bracted Twistflower is endemic to central Texas and doesn't grow anywhere else. Small populations are struggling to persist in Frio and Medina County as well as San Antonio and Austin, Texas. The lilac colored flowers are a rare beauty and worth conserving.



Bracted Twistflower | *Streptanthus bracteatus*
Photo: Casey Cowan



Maintenance staff picking up litter

Natural Areas maintenance staff are trained to have a diverse range of skills to tackle a wide range of tasks, and we are fortunate to have them care for our Natural Areas where the needs often change daily. Not only do they maintain the trails, they must know how to use heavy equipment—from chainsaws, to general carpentry tools and heavy equipment. They are trained on proper herbicide application in order to maintain native species. On any given day, you may see staff weed whacking curb lines, leaf blowing parking lots, or maintaining garden beds. Without our maintenance crew to maintain these green spaces, we wouldn't have pristine Natural Areas to visit. Next time you visit the Natural Areas, say hello or thank them for their dedication, and remember to [Leave No Trace](#) on your next visit.

Sincerely,
Thomas Paine
Nature Preserve Officer

Spines, Prickles, and Thorns, Oh My!

Ever wonder about those sharp things on plants? If you've spent any time outdoors in South Texas, then you know these painful things on plants or even some seeds can be a little prickly at times. But the differences aren't always clear, and even some of the most knowledgeable plant experts may be challenged! In the Starting Out Wild classes, we call them "[pokies and pricklies](#)" but there are a number of ways to tell the difference so we created a little [nature scavenger hunt](#) to help you get started! Take a walk in any Natural Area park, or just have a walk around your local park or neighborhood to see what you find. If you're unsure of the plant, you can always download the app and share a photo to [i-Naturalist](#) and someone will help you with identification. Happy hunting and we hope you enjoy all that nature has to offer, even if it's a shield of armor!

Nicole McLeod
Education Coordinator

While hiking on trails, keep group size small, and ALWAYS stay on the designated trails for the safety of others. Failure to do so endangers yourself, others, and the ecosystem.

If you're unable to do that, enjoying nature right where you live is recommended. Discover nature in your neighborhood and you may notice that with less traffic noise you can hear the sound of birds. Take time to identify the trees in your neighborhood using this [TAMU identification guide](#).

If you see people failing to maintain 6' distance or vandalizing parks properties, please call 311 and/or the police non emergency line at 210-207-SAPD.

COVID-19: SOCIAL DISTANCING IN PUBLIC PARKS AND TRAILS



We hope that you will follow the recommendations of the National Recreation and Parks Association that emphasize the importance of social distancing on park trails.

Please pick up your own trash and deposit it in trash bins at park entrance.



Thank you for helping us protect the Natural Areas and the health of our San Antonio community.

Are you connected to San Antonio Natural Areas on social media?

You can like us on [Facebook](#).

Find us on [Instagram](#) @sanaturalareas.

Are you a member of Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas (FoSANA)?

Please support FoSANA on the preservation and educational outreach of natural areas around San Antonio by joining or renewing your membership [online](#) today.

Your membership this year will help us continue to

- offer over 400 environmental programs for families and adults at the Natural Areas.
- serve over 14,000 families and adults through education and outreach programs.
- coordinate over 400 volunteer programs and 7,500 volunteer hours supported trail maintenance, habitat conservation and restoration, and native landscapes and gardens.

Plus, when you renew your membership, you'll receive our monthly newsletter that provides updates on natural areas happenings and timely information on upcoming events. Should you need any assistance or have any questions or comments about your membership, please feel free to email us at friendsofsanaturalareas@gmail.com.

Sincerely,
FoSANA Board

Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas is dedicated to promoting stewardship of San Antonio's Natural Areas, and to the understanding and appreciation of nature through educational and

scientific programs.

For the latest updates and more activities, please see the calendar on the FOSANA website.

[Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas Website](#)
