

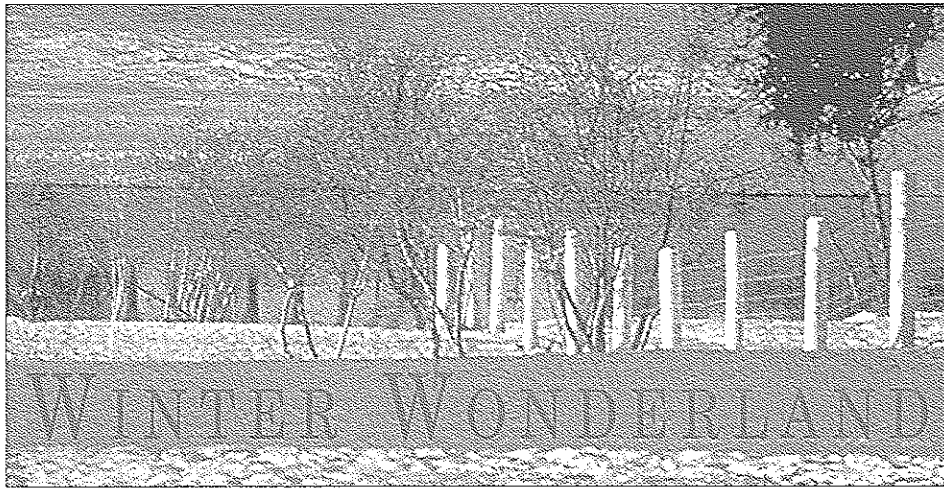


NATIONAL WILDFLOWER RESEARCH CENTER

wildflower

November/December 1996

Volume 13, Number 6



*F.M. Oxley
Education Programs
Manager / Sr. Botanist*

Winter is one of my favorite times of year. Not only is the weather much cooler, but I'm always bowled over by the beauty of the landscape. And, contrary to popular belief, nature doesn't shut down during winter. Although the flowers are gone and there may be snow on the ground, the plants are still there, going about their business.

Most plants undergo a period of dormancy during winter, and may appear dead. Dormancy, which occurs in both seeds and mature plants, is actually a period of rest during which active growth slows or stops completely. It often is characterized by leaf drop in trees and shrubs, and, sometimes, by death of aboveground plant parts. Dormancy is a good thing. Plants and seeds don't expend energy germinating

or producing new growth that would be damaged or killed by harsh weather, and flowers aren't left waiting for absent pollinators. Winter temperatures help break seed dormancy in some species, allowing seeds to germinate the following spring.

That "dead, brown" plant material we tend to overlook provides forage, shelter, and nesting for a variety of wildlife, as well as warm cover for

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Origins of the Christmas Tree

*F.M. Oxley
Education Programs Manager /
Sr. Botanist*

Regardless of our different memories of Christmas, most involve the Christmas tree. It generally occupies the most prominent place in the house, decorating it is often a family ritual, and, of course, it serves as the centerpiece for the display of gifts. The origin of the tree as a symbol of Christmas has its roots in our earliest history.

For many cultures, trees were the physical manifestation of Nature itself. Revered as the representation of spirits and the homes of gods and goddesses, it was natural for people to worship under trees and in sacred groves. Often, a particular tree would be singled out and worshiped as the manifestation of a higher deity. Eventually, sacred groves came to be regarded in much the same way as churches and temples.

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Development Director's Report: **That's What Friends Are For . . .**

Events, events, events, and people, people, people! This year had us moving at record pace from one activity to another, and we have many friends to thank for their contributions to our achievements. Our many events, such as the Wildflower Days Festival, the Wildflower Spring Gala, our first free-admission day, the Wildflower Serenade music series, and the Wildflower Patrons Program, have raised crucial funds while bringing new enthusiasm for our mission during this very busy year.

Through the support of our more than 22,000 members (did you know that

just under half of you hail from outside Texas?) and various friends in the community, we held our annual Wildflower Days Festival in April. While the drought kept blooms down along roadsides, the Center was bright with wildflowers. Major sponsors of this very successful event included H.E.B. Food Stores, Southern Union Gas, the *Austin American-Statesman* newspaper, Newsradio 590 KLBJ, and MCI Telecommunications.

A highlight of the spring season was the Wildflower Spring Gala, led by dynamic Gala co-chair, Deedie Rose of Dallas. The Gala was held to honor

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Blanton of Houston, co-chairs, with Mr. Nash Castro of New York, of the Capital Campaign. This successful campaign raised the funds to build our wonderful new facility.

Our special thanks to Randalls Food Stores, who underwrote our first free-admission day at the Center last August. More than 400 visitors braved the Texas heat and were astounded by the blooms

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Mae Daniller is the Wildflower Center's Director of Development

The National Wildflower Research Center is a nonprofit research and educational organization committed to the preservation and reestablishment of native wildflowers, grasses, shrubs, trees, and vines in planned landscapes.

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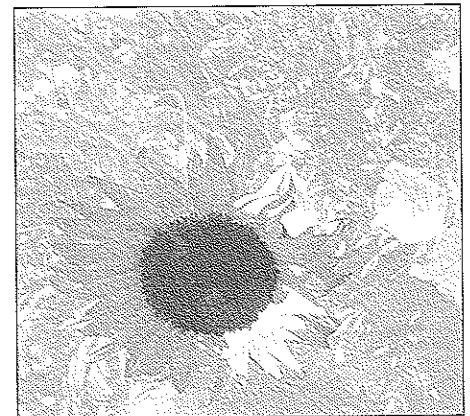
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D I V E R S I T Y is Wonderful!

Diversity is essential in nature, and provides the necessary balance for healthy ecosystems. We at the Wildflower Center also depend on diversity, especially among our supporters, to further our mission and ensure our continued leadership in the field of native plant preservation and reestablishment.

A key element of our diversity is our members, who read this newsletter, ask astute questions of our botanists, and enjoy participating in the many programs and events sponsored by the Wildflower Center. In addition, our many visitors bring us new insight to their interests and needs, and reinforce the effectiveness of the exhibits, gardens, and publications we provide. Finally, there are those who provide funding through participation in our galas, sponsor our education and outreach programs, and support our garden research.

We could not be more grateful for the diversity of supporters or the diversity of support we have received

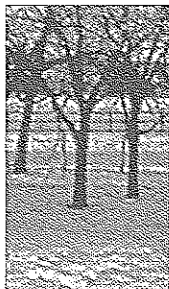


this year. Our small staff could never achieve our lofty goals without your enthusiasm for our programs and your belief in the Center's mission. Thank you for making it possible for us to promote native plants, sow the seeds of knowledge, and achieve the funding goals to help meet the needs of this thriving organization. Please accept our deepest appreciation for your help in making the Wildflower Center one of North America's leading environmental organizations.

Wonderland

plant seedlings which sprouted in fall. Fruits and berries are a nutritious food source for animal populations, especially many bird species that don't migrate.

Biology aside, nature has its own winter beauty. Grasses, which have gone to seed, offer a wide variety of beautiful shapes and textures against a white carpet of snow. The rustle of spent seed heads moving in the breeze

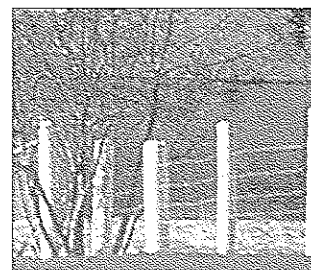


provides a soothing counterpoint to winter's inherent stillness. Fruits and berries create startling splashes of color on the winter landscape, and the vibrant hues of lustrous evergreen leaves remind us that nature is only sleeping and spring is just around the corner.

Winter trees have their own surreal beauty. The outlines of bare branches contrasting starkly against gray skies resemble a mad architect's city skyline. Ice covered branches sparkle in the sunlight. Dangling icicles act as prisms,

sending rainbows across the snow.

Take some extra time this year to look closely at the winter landscape. I think you'll be surprised at the often overlooked and hidden beauty. And take to heart the words of Anne Bradstreet: "If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant."



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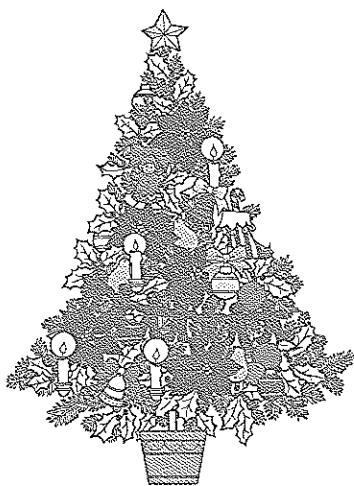
Christmas Tree

The rites and ceremonies that took place in these sacred groves often involved sacrifices and gifts, placed on the ground beneath the tree or in its branches. In her book, *The Solstice Evergreen*, author Sheryl Karas recounts how the Druids of ancient Europe placed apples in the branches of oaks and firs during their winter solstice as thanks to Odin (their chief deity). Lighted candles, thanking Balder the sun god, also were placed in branches. The connection between today's Christmas tree and the sacred tree of old is hard to ignore.

Evergreens were held in the highest regard, and were seen to symbolize life and strength. Unlike deciduous species such as oaks and birches, evergreens didn't drop their leaves during the winter, appearing fresh, green, and vibrantly alive throughout the long cold months. This quality led people to believe that evergreens were stronger than other trees, and they came to represent eternal life.

Trees also played a central role in ancient people's understanding of the universe and their place in it. A common perception of the universe was of

a sphere cut in half by a horizontal plane. The three cosmic regions, Earth, heaven, and hell, were linked via a central axis, often symbolized as a tree. Communication between the three regions took place through this Tree of Life, and when a person died, their soul returned to the Tree to await its next incarnation.



With the advent of Christianity, many of these beliefs about the universe and the sacred tree were set aside. As Christianity made its way into France, England, and Germany, pagan worship of any kind was forbidden. The old gods and goddesses were declared devils, and it became a sin

even to speak their names. Tree worship was outlawed, and many sacred trees and groves were destroyed.

Certain popular holidays, such as Yule, and customs, such as lighting candles and offering small sacrifices under certain holy trees, could not be stopped. Christian priests gave these holidays new meanings and incorporated them into Christian rituals. Candles now symbolized Christ as the light of the world and the small sacrifices came to represent gifts the wise men brought the Christ child.

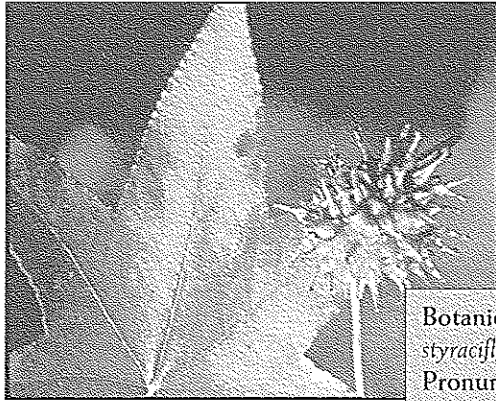
During the Middle Ages, Paradise Plays were performed in front of or inside churches. Paradise Plays told the story of the Creation and the Fall of Adam and Eve, the only prop: an evergreen fir hung with apples. A variation on the ancient Yule Tree, it represented both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. Gradually, the Paradise Tree made its way out of churches and into Christian homes. Symbolizing the coming of the Savior, the Paradise Tree often stood next to the Yule Tree, which symbolized eternal life. It was only natural that, eventually, one tree took the place of both. Thus was born the Christmas tree.

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NOTEBOOK

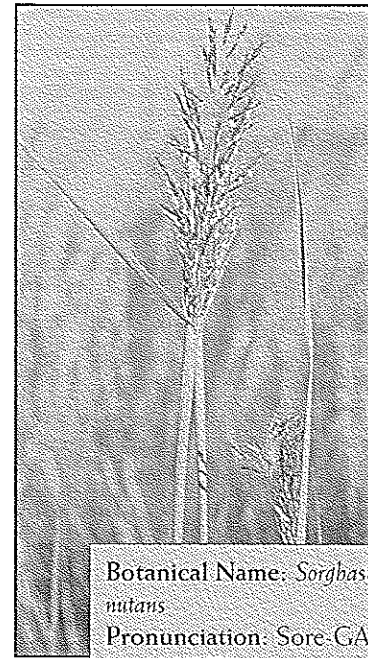
Winter Species



Albert Vick

Botanical Name: *Liquidambar styraciflua*
Pronunciation: Li-kwid-AM-bar sti-ra-KI-floo-a
Common Name: Sweetgum
Family: Hamamelidaceae (Witch Hazel)

The mace-like fruits are actually composed of many individual fruits which mature in fall and persist throughout winter.



Prairie Restorations, Inc.

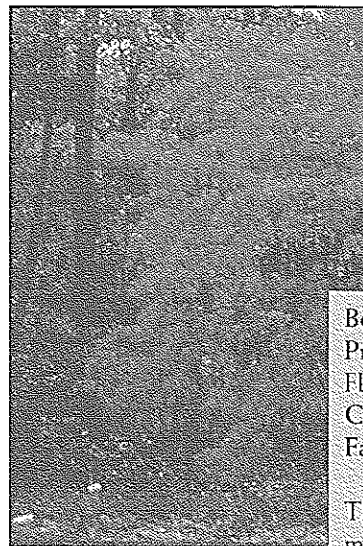
Botanical Name: *Sorghastrum nutans*
Pronunciation: Sore-GAS-strum NUT-ans
Common Name: Indian grass
Family: Poaceae (Grass)

This warm season native perennial blooms from August through September and provides grazing for wildlife.



Botanical Name: *Ilex decidua*
Pronunciation: EYE-lex dee-SID-you-ah
Common Name: Possumhaw, winterberry
Family: Aquifoliaceae (Holly)

Preferring moist soils along streams and in swamps, possumhaw is so called because opossums (and other mammals and birds) love the bright red fruit.



Albert Vick

Botanical Name: *Cornus florida*
Pronunciation: COR-nus FLOOR-i-dah
Common Name: Flowering dogwood
Family: Cornaceae (Dogwood)

The flowering dogwood is easily the most beautiful Eastern North American tree. Its showy spring flowers, scarlet fall foliage, and brilliant red fruits provide year-round color throughout its range.

Watch Out For Wild Drivers!

The pinkish blossoms of the mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), the state flower of Connecticut, are getting very good mileage these days – as much as 35 miles-per-gallon or better. Thanks to the efforts of the Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut, Inc. (members of the National Council of State and Local Garden Clubs), Connecticut drivers can purchase a special interest "Protect Wildflowers" license plate featuring the blooms of this native shrub. If your state offers a similar



license plate featuring our native North American flora, please send this information to the Wildflower Center, 4801 La Crosse Ave., Austin, TX 78739, Attn: Editor.

License plate courtesy of the Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut, Inc.

Wild Ideas for the Holidays

What better way to begin the holiday season than at the Wildflower Center's annual Wild Ideas holiday shopping event December 6 - 8?

Besides the free admission and 10% member discount you enjoy every day, you also will enjoy tax-free shopping Friday and Saturday, December 6 and 7. New specials and several surprises will be featured every day, and artists and artisans will be on hand to sell special pieces. Hours are 9 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and Noon - 5 p.m. Sunday.

Call (512) 292-4300
for more information.

F From the I E L D

NEW ENGLAND

Jamaica Plain, MA: *Fruits and Seeds and How They Travel*, November 8 & 15, *The Mosses of New England*, November 12, 19, 26 & December 3, *Broad-leaved Evergreens for New England*, November 7 & 14, Contact: The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, 125 Arborway, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130, (617) 524-1718.

NORTHEAST

Brooklyn, NY: *Carnivorous Plants*, November 10, 17, or 24, *Introduction to Composting*, November 6, Contact: Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1000 Washington Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11225, (718) 622-4433.

Buffalo, NY: *Flora of the Rush Oak Openings Community*, November 12, Contact: Niagara Frontier Botanical Society, Buffalo Museum of Science, 1020 Humboldt Parkway, Buffalo, NY 14211.

Washington Crossing, PA: *Knowing Native Plants: Winter Weeds & Seeds*, November 9, *Natural Landscaping: Inviting Nature Back to Your Property*, November 16, Contact: Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve, Box 103, Washington Crossing, PA 18977, (215) 862-2924.

ATLANTIC COAST

New Brunswick, NJ: *Roadside and Right-of-Way Vegetation Management*, December 2, Contact: Cook College Office of Continuing Professional Education, Box 231, New Brunswick, NJ 08903, (908) 932-9271.

SOUTHEAST

Athens, GA: *Evergreen Ramble*, November 16, Contact: The State Botanical Garden of Georgia, 2450 S. Milledge Ave., Athens, GA 30605, (706) 542-1244.

OKLAHOMA/TEXAS

Austin, TX: *Wild Basin Walk*, November 9, 10, 17, 23, 24, December 7, 8, 14, 15 & 21, Contact: Wild Basin Wilderness, 805 N. Capital of Texas Hwy., Austin, TX 78746, (512) 327-7622.

WEST

Tucson, AZ: *Native Vegetation Salvage Operations and Monitoring at a Large Master-Planned Community*, November 6, Contact: Arizona Native Plant Society, Box 41206, Sun Station, Tucson, AZ 85717.

Director's Report

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not deterred by the drought.

The summer was punctuated by three wonderful Wildflower Serenades, which drew record crowds. Major media sponsors KASE/KVET Radio and *etc.* magazine spread the word for performances by Kelly Willis, The Geezinslaws, and Don Walser. In addition, Dell Webb's Sun City Georgetown ended the season on a high note by being a major sponsor for Don Walser in October. To all – our applause.

And, of course, we continue to wel-

come new supporters to our Wildflower Patrons Program. This year, Wildflower Patrons enjoyed special receptions and are looking forward to a Patron's dinner next spring. We also are thrilled to recognize our Wildflower Patron's Council members, who support the Center's general programs and broaden our constituency to include their employees and friends. Members of the Patrons Council include businesses such as The Whitley Company, and we are eager to welcome others to this program.

Finally, the Center is grateful to the supporters of our education programs, such as 3M and the Rockwell Fund, Inc. They help make our education programs a focal point for our many visitors from across North America.

Thanks to your support and commitment, 1997 will be a lively year. While we can't thank all our supporters in this small space, know we could never fulfill our goals without you. Thank you for the energy and support you bring to our cause.



Give A Gift For All Seasons: MEMBERSHIP in the National Wildflower Research Center

This holiday season, share the joy of wildflowers and the Wildflower Center by giving a gift of an annual membership.

Benefits include:

- free admission
- award-winning newsletter
- discounts in *Wild Ideas: The Store* and the catalog
- member prices for events and classes.

To give the gift of Wildflower Center membership, mail this form with your check for a \$25 Individual or \$35 Household Membership. To find out about higher levels of support (with even greater benefits), call the Membership Office at (512) 292-4200 ext. 126.

Please enter an annual membership for:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/ZIP: _____

Phone: _____

Gift Membership: If you are giving this membership as a gift, please fill in the information below.

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Phone: _____

- Make your check payable to: NWRC
- Mail to: Membership, National Wildflower Research Center, Box 149187, Austin, TX 78714-9934

13/6



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The Wildflower Center is a member of Earth Share of Texas.

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Grow Native!

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