

Field and Nature Journal

THE GARDENS AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

The Gardens






Welcome to **The Gardens** **at Texas A&M** **University!**

Use this field journal and your observation skills to journey through The Gardens. Learn about plants that have adapted to thrive in the Brazos Valley and surrounding areas. Discover what these plants look like at different times of the year and observe the habitats in which they grow.

Please remember that The Gardens is a living museum, and all these activities are to be completed from the paths or turf areas only. Do not pick any plants during your visit and never eat anything from the wild unless an expert has identified it.

OBSERVE: *Plants look different in every season. For example, some plants lose their leaves in the fall, others produce colorful berries, and others are in full bloom. Depending on the season you are visiting The Gardens, some plants or parts of plants may not be visible. Note the time of year you are making your observation and come back in a different season to see how the plants have changed.*



The Leach Teaching Gardens

is a 7-acre area of The Gardens with 21 themed gardens, an event lawn, an outdoor classroom, a demonstration area and a pavilion for special events.



Legend

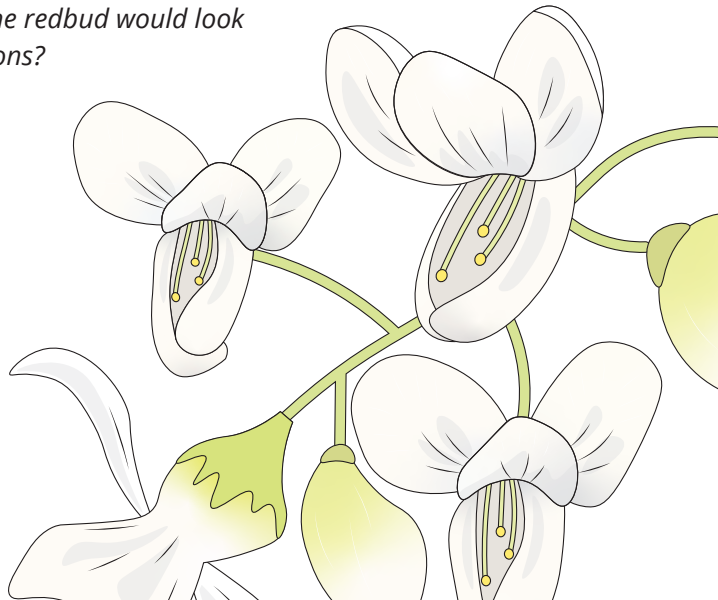
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White Texas Redbud

Cercis canadensis *var. texensis* 'Alba'

The white Texas redbud is a white, flowering cultivated variety of its eastern relative, the Texas Redbud. It is noted for its white flowers that appear in early spring. Does the fruit of the redbud look like any vegetable we eat? If you thought of legumes like peas, sugar snaps, green beans or peanuts, you are correct. The redbud is in the pea family (*Fabaceae*) and was once an important food source for Native Americans.

*What season are you visiting The Gardens?
What do you think the redbud would look like in different seasons?*



Texas Spider Lily

Hymenocallis liriosme

Texas spider lilies and other similar plants are commonly found in ditches, ponds or other wet areas where they help offer soil stability and play an important role in the conservation and protection of water resources. In cities, impervious surfaces like streets and sidewalks prevent rainwater from soaking into the ground. Rainwater runoff can transport pollutants to rivers, lakes and streams, endangering aquatic ecosystems and drinking water. Rain gardens like this one help protect the environment by capturing water and allowing it to soak into the ground.

Do you know where rainwater ends up where you live? What can you do to help conserve water resources?



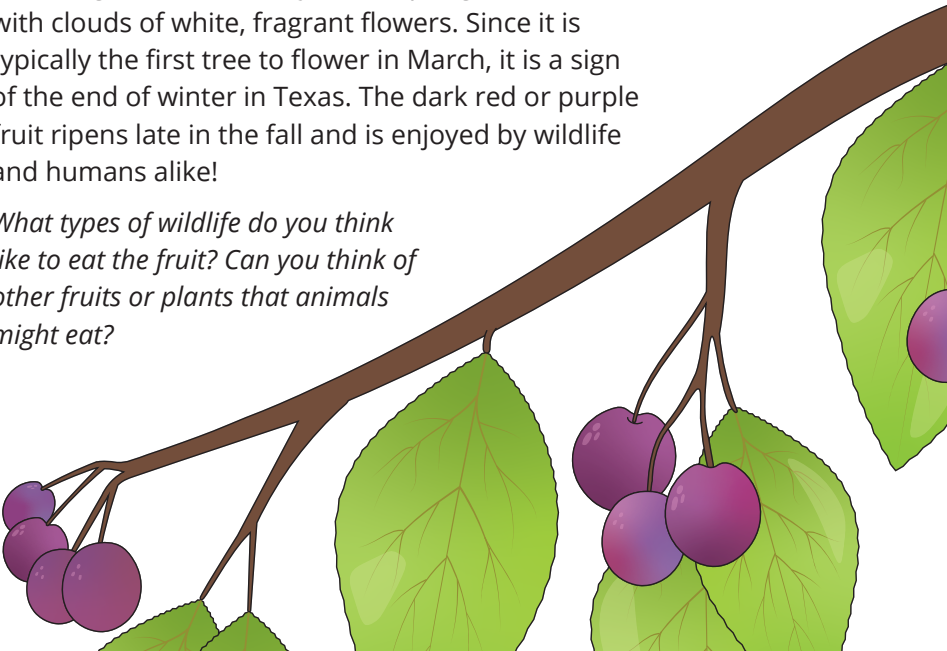


Mexican Plum

Prunus mexicana

Mexican plum is a beautiful, single-trunked, spring-flowering small tree. Early in the spring, it is covered with clouds of white, fragrant flowers. Since it is typically the first tree to flower in March, it is a sign of the end of winter in Texas. The dark red or purple fruit ripens late in the fall and is enjoyed by wildlife and humans alike!

What types of wildlife do you think like to eat the fruit? Can you think of other fruits or plants that animals might eat?



Milkweed

Asclepias curassavica

Several milkweed species grow successfully in Texas, including Antelope Horns, Green Milkweed, and Butterfly Weed. These different species of milkweed are important to the survival of monarch butterflies. The monarchs lay their eggs on milkweed leaves, which serve as a habitat to the caterpillar and is their sole food source. By planting milkweed in your home garden, you can provide the monarchs a place to rest and prepare for their long journey.

You can help by planting native milkweed species in your own garden! Look around for other plants that could help butterflies and other pollinators. List some below.



Scan here or visit tx.ag/monarchjourney to learn more about monarch migration.



Esperanza

Tecoma stans

As a Texas Superstar plant, Esperanza has recently become a popular ornamental plant in Texas gardens. In the wild, it grows on rocky slopes near San Antonio and in the Trans-Pecos area. The striking, bright yellow flowers are highlighted by shiny, green foliage and continue through the heat of the summer. The flowers have an odd but pleasing fragrance and provide nectar for bees. Native Americans made bows from its wood, and it has also been used for various medicines.

Compare the yellow flowers of the Esperanza to a nearby plant. How are the flowers similar? How are they different?



Desert Willow

Chilopsis linearis

Desert willow is a delicate, small deciduous tree native to West Texas and the Edwards Plateau. Its long, narrow leaves resemble those of willows, although they are not related. Its flowers are trumpet-shaped, sweetly fragrant, range from light pink to light violet and produce an excellent honey. Traditionally, the dried flowers are sold in local Mexican markets as a remedy for coughs and other respiratory ailments.

Take a moment to sit, close your eyes and just listen for a minute. What do you hear around you or nearby? What different sounds do you think you would hear if you were visiting at a different time of day?

Turk's Cap

Malvaviscus arboreus *var. drummondii*



Turk's cap is one of Texas' best-loved and most-used flowering ornamentals. In its native habitat, Turk's cap is fairly large. Its vermilion red flowers are twisted into a tube showing extended red stamens protruding from the whorl. Although drought tolerant, Turk's cap also tolerates Houston's gumbo soil, and is especially welcome in shady sites. Various birds and animals enjoy the marble-size fruit. The flowers provide nectar to eager ruby-throated hummingbirds and several species of butterflies.

Do you see any other Turk's cap with different colored flowers in The Gardens? Which color do the birds and butterflies seem to like more?

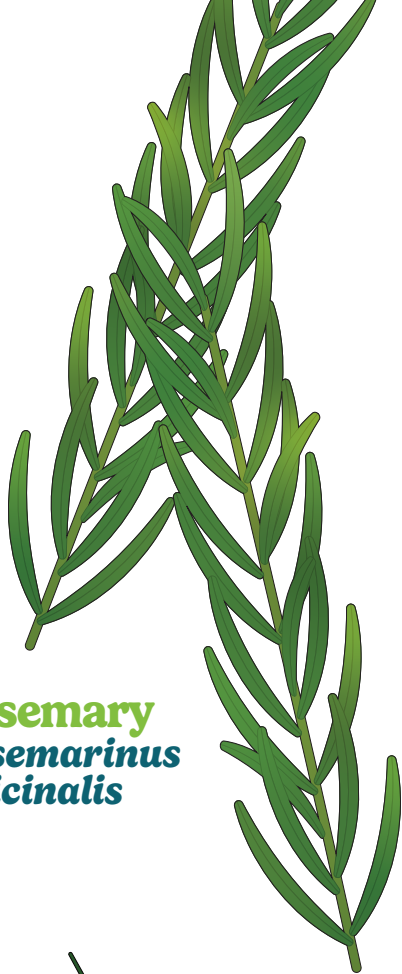
Herbs

Herbs are an ancient category of the plant world. They are found almost everywhere and generally defined as “the useful plants.” Besides adding beauty, they can be used for cooking, making scents and perfumes, practicing aromatherapy, herbal healing in folklore and in modern medicine, and attracting bees and butterflies to the garden. Basil, rosemary and chives are just a few herbs you will find around the Herb Garden.



Basil
Ocimum
basilicum

Take a moment and smell the different herbs around the Herb Garden. Do you recognize any from your own kitchen? Which one is your favorite smell?



Rosemary
Rosemarinus
officinalis



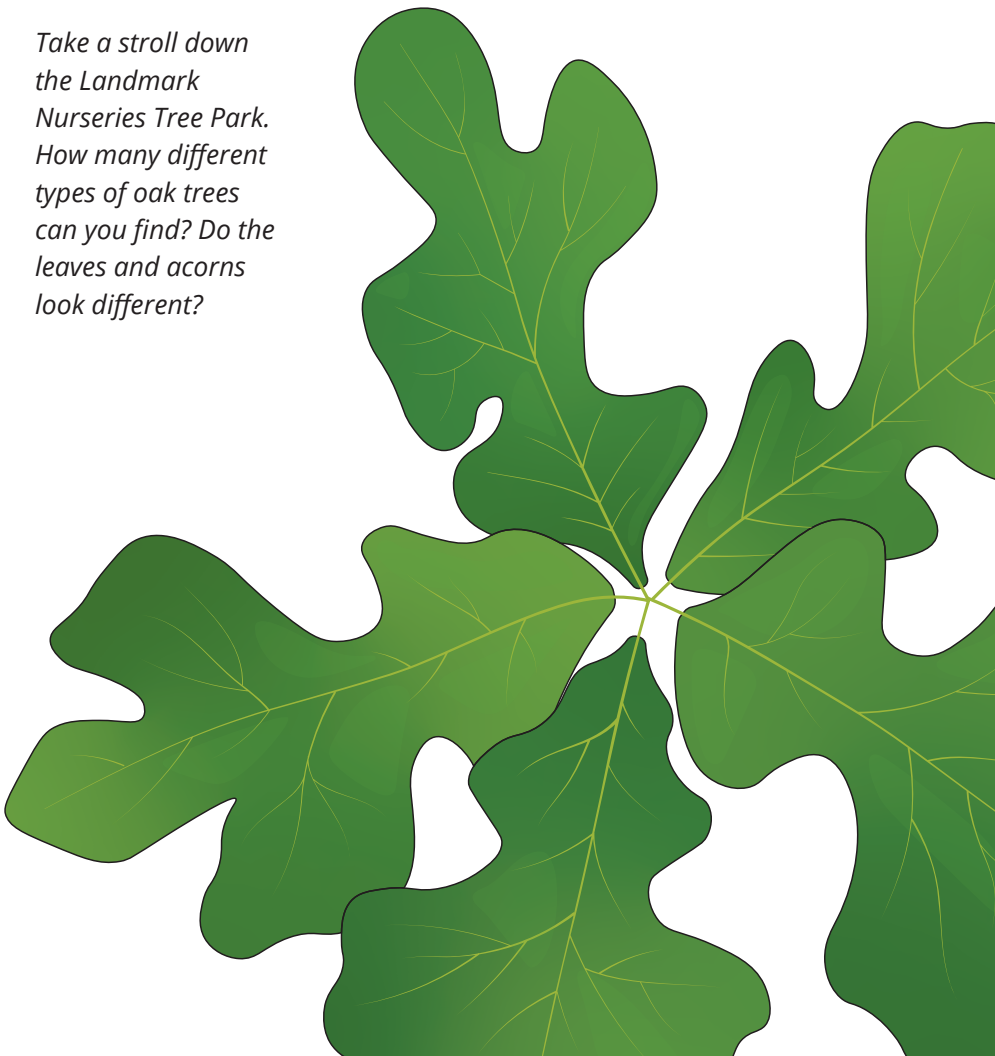
Chives
Allium
spp.

Post Oak

Quercus stellata

One of the most widespread oaks in Texas, the post oak is common to both East and Central Texas. So common, it gives rise to the name for an entire ecoregion, the Post Oak Savannah. This specific tree is a legacy from the post oak savanna in Brazos County. It is estimated to be more than 200 years old! Named Ol' Sarge by the local community, it is the largest known post oak in Brazos County.

Take a stroll down the Landmark Nurseries Tree Park. How many different types of oak trees can you find? Do the leaves and acorns look different?



A detailed line drawing of a pecan branch. The branch is vertical and has several large, ovate leaves with serrated margins and prominent pinnate venation. In the center of the branch, there is a cluster of five pecan nuts. Each nut is shown in detail, with its characteristic ribbed, scaly surface and pointed tip. The drawing is in black ink on a white background.

Pecan Tree

Carya illinoensis

The pecan is the state tree of Texas and has an essential place in the state's history. They are an important agricultural crop in Texas, grown commercially on over 70,000 acres across the state. Pecan trees prefer river bottoms, which is why we chose to plant them along White Creek. These trees will grow tall, sinking their roots deep into the ground, which helps reduce erosion along the creek.

*Have you ever tried a pecan?
What did it taste like? What is
something you could make at
home that has pecans in it?*

Field Notes





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