

An Interesting Assortment of Woody Plants in the Rose and Elm Families

In previous weeks I have written about plants in the Beech family (all the oaks), the Sumac family and the Legume family. Today I want to discuss woody plants in the Rose family (Rosaceae) and the Elm family (Ulmaceae).

The Rose family is represented in the Hill Country by hawthorns, crabapples, plums, cherries and dewberries.

There are many different species and sub-species of Hawthorns (*Crataegus* spp.), none very common in our area. They are characterized by having simple, alternate leaves usually significantly toothed in the upper half and most sport long straight thorns. They are most often found along creek bottoms growing among other vegetation to protect them from deer.

The Blanco Crabapple (*Malus ioensis* var. *texensis*) is a large rounded shrub found only in Kerr, Blanco and Kendall counties and is threatened by overabundant deer. It has simple alternate 2 to 3 inch oblong leaves with fine hairs and toothed margins, some of which grow on 2 inch long thorns. They have light pink blossoms in April.

A Creek plum (*Prunus rivularis*) is a small shrub that, as the name implies, is usually found along creek bottoms. It produces numerous tiny five-petal white flowers in clusters along the stem in February and March before the leaves come out. It is a prolific root-sprouter which can form thickets.

Mexican plum (*Prunus mexicana*) has a more tree-like growth habit than the creek plum and does not root-sprout. It produces clusters of half inch white flowers in February to March before the leaves come out which attract numerous native bees. Its fruit is a $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch purple plum.

The Escarpment black cherry (*Prunus serotina* var. *eximia*) is a very desirable large tree with dark green 3 to 5 inch simple leaves with finely toothed margins. It makes 6 inch long clusters of tiny white flowers and produces very small ($\frac{1}{4}$ inch) fruit for the birds. Young branches are silver-gray banded but older trunks have nearly-black rough bark.

Dewberry (*Rubus trivialis*) is a trailing vine with small prickles along the stem. It has compound leaves with 3 to 5 leaflets with coarse teeth. It produces black berries up to a half inch.

The Elm Family (Ulmaceae) is represented in the Hill Country by two hackberries and three elms.

Netleaf hackberry (*Celtis laevigata* var. *reticulata*) is a medium-sized tree with rough 2 to 4 inch asymmetric leaves tapering to a point. It is most easily recognized by having

rough bark with what appears to be “warts” on the bark. It produces small red berries. Its leaves and fruit are important wildlife food used by many species. Here in the Hill Country we are on the eastern edge of its range.

Sugarberry or Sugar hackberry (*Celtis laevigata* var. *laevigata*) is a very closely-related tree that can be hard to distinguish from its Netleaf cousin. Sugarberry leaves are somewhat less rough than Netleaf. We are on the western edge of the range for this species so both species can be found here.

Cedar elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*) is a very desirable, large tree. This tree is easily identified by its very small (usually less than 2 inches) oblong, stiff, rough leaves with toothed edges. It is unusual for a tree in that it blooms in late summer to fall and attracts hoards of native bees at that time. It is a very strong tree that appears to be largely disease-free.

The American elm (*Ulmus americana*) is a favorite long-lived American tree that was killed in large numbers by Dutch elm disease a few decades ago. It is a large tree with large, somewhat rough-textured leaves 4 to 6 inches long and 2 to 4 inches wide tapering to a point. These are not common trees in the Hill Country, but certainly not rare either. They are most likely to be found near creeks, but not touching the water.

Slippery elm (*Ulmus rubra*) is very similar to the American elm in terms of size, appearance and leaves. It is not as long-lived as the American elm. Distinguishing between the two can be difficult. The leaves of Slippery elm are rougher on top than the American elm and the wafer-shaped seeds, called samaras, do not have hairs on the margins as do the American elm samaras.

Until next time...

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