

## It's Not Winter Yet!

I guess I lived too long in the cold, snowy Northeast before I moved back to Texas. Because somewhere along the way I developed a mindset that December is in the winter. I know it doesn't start officially until around the 21<sup>st</sup>, but in the Northeast the weather says winter when we reach December. And it was only about 10 days ago that we had the big ice storm that broke several of our big tree limbs and coated everything with a layer of ice.

Well guess what? It is December 3<sup>rd</sup>, and as I write this it is 82 degrees outside! Sunshine, no wind—a beautiful day. That was when my wife came in and said butterflies were covering our rosemary—and maybe it would make a good column.

Sure enough, when I went out with my camera, I found our rosemary bush was covered with small yellow butterflies, clouded sulphur butterflies to be more specific. They were flitting around from one tiny purple bloom to another, never spending much time on any one bloom, which of course didn't make photographing them very easy.

As I stood there trying to get one in focus I did notice the sulphurs were not the only insects to find the rosemary delicious. There was a queen butterfly having to make do with the rosemary since the Gregg's mistflower quit blooming about a week ago. There was also a gulf fritillary and a snout butterfly on the shrub as well as several different kinds of bees—all trying to stock up before real winter sets in.

These were not the only signs that we were not in winter yet. Not far from the rosemary I noticed a lone Mexican hat in bloom. Most all of the other Mexican hats around had long since died back to a rosette hugging the ground, preparing to survive the winter before springing forth next spring. Also, we have one lone sunflower that is in bloom, having sprouted late from a spilled bird feeder.

It is always interesting to see the individual variation in the state of color change and leaf drop in different trees. For instance, some of our prairie flameleaf sumacs have lived up to their names by turning red and maroon, but some of them this year turned bright yellow before dropping their leaves.

Our Eve's necklace is bright yellow right now and just beginning to drop its leaves. Some post oaks are nearly bare while others just a few feet away still have most of their leaves, many of which are yellow-orange. Blackjacks seem to hold onto their yellow and red leaves after color change longer than most trees. Escarpment black cherries are still green as are the possumhaws. The buckeyes, Mexican plums and redbuds are all just bare branches now, as are some of the hackberries. The walnuts, being among the first to drop leaves, did so over a month ago.

With a lot fewer green leaves around, I discovered a 2-foot tall sprout that I had not seen before. Several years ago we had two peach trees come up on the edge of our compost pile, obviously from peach pits thrown in the compost. They are about 8 feet tall now, not in an ideal location, but bearing fruit anyway. Well today I discovered the new peach tree, about 20 feet from the other trees, thanks I suppose to a squirrel or other animal for burying a seed from the original trees.

I know it is well past the peak leaf-color time for bigtooth maples at Lost Maples State Park, but our bigtooth maple has only begun the slightest amount of color change so far.

The copper canyon daisy is in full bloom right now and attracting its own group of butterflies by the front porch.

I love to see our tall native grasses backlit on a sunny day with their seed heads making for a great show. Indiangrass, switchgrass, all the muhly grasses as well as silver bluestem all brighten our yard.

I know the great weather of today will be gone again soon and we may be back into a freezing-rain situation, but perhaps that makes days like today even more special. If we had them every day, we probably would not appreciate all the beauty around us and the bounty Mother Nature has given us.

Until next time...

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