

Changes Observed as Winter Turns into Spring

Readers: The following column was written in 2013, but I thought it was interesting how the timing of many plants is different around my place this year than back then. And I suspect the timing of things on your place are different from mine. Plants don't have calendars. What they do respond to is the amount of daylight and temperature and rainfall over the past few months, and the latter two vary every year.

This year (2013) my New Year's resolution was to do a better job of recording my daily nature observations in a notebook or journal in order to document the progression of spring. The results so far are not perfect, but much better than previous years. Here are some of my observations:

As expected, the first sign of spring occurred on the last day of January—the elbow-bush was blooming and full of tiny bees and wasps. There is a reason they call it the “Spring Herald”. The elbow-bush didn't show any signs of leaves for another month.

The next thing to bloom around our place was the Mexican plum in mid-February, followed by the creek plum in early March and the Mexican redbud a few days later. I didn't record the first blooms of the Texas redbud, but they are usually a week or two after the Mexican redbud.

Our possumhaw began showing leaves the first week of March, followed by breaking buds on one of our blackjack oaks a few days later.

By the second week in March the rusty blackhaw viburnum had leaves and its first bloom. The blackjack oak was also in bloom. I observed the first leaves on the rough leaf dogwood, yellow buckeye, creek plum, wafer ash, cedar elm and gum bumelia the second week of March.

The third week of March saw the post oaks beginning to bloom, the blackjack beginning to leaf out as well as the fragrant sumac, switchgrass, Eve's necklace, mesquite and Vasey oak. This was also the week that the first bluebonnets began to bloom, as did the Spanish oaks, and the volunteer peach trees that came up adjacent to the compost pile a few years ago. I know the coral honeysuckle began blooming before the third week in March, but that was the first time I noticed it.

By the third week in March, the live oaks had lost most of last year's leaves in their spring leaf exchange and were beginning to bloom and to show new leaves. Also, the bald cypress was beginning to make cones, the bois d'arc and Texas persimmon began to show leaves, and the shin oak's buds were breaking.

By the fourth week in March, the Carolina buckthorn, Mexican buckeye, desert willow, fragrant mimosa, acacia, hackberry, amorpha, escarpment black cherry

and Blanco crabapple were all showing leaves.

Toward the end of March, I observed the first leaves on the retama, kidneywood, flame-leaf sumac, greenbrier, Virginia creeper, trumpet creeper, black dalea and walnut.

Also, by the end of March we had not only bluebonnets blooming, but also rosemary, four-nerve daisy, columbine, prairie verbena, low verbena, Engelmann daisy, pink evening primrose, blackfoot daisy, prairie phlox, spiderwort, gaura, and I am sure others I didn't write down. Grasses showing new leaves included switchgrass, Eastern gammagrass, Texas wintergrass, rescuegrass, cheatgrass, little barley, Scribner's dichanthelium and big bluestem.

Interestingly, not all individuals of a species bloom and leaf out at the same time, even when they are in close proximity. About 6 years ago we had two blackjack oaks come up in our back yard, both the same year and about 8 feet apart. Given the distance these new oaks were from the nearest mature blackjack, I assume they were planted by the squirrels.

On March 19 I noted that one of the blackjacks was totally leafed out with almost full-size leaves, but the other had only begun to show the first tiny leaves. Not until the end of March did the second blackjack grow nearly-mature-size leaves.

Similarly, I noticed our mature Spanish oak had leafed out about 2 weeks ahead of a couple of Spanish oaks that we had planted.

The point is that plants are just like animals and humans, no two are exactly alike, and their DNA has enough variation to make them different from each other just as we are. And I am sure that the plants around your place didn't match those at our place in terms of timing of bloom or making new leaves. And all will be different again next year.

Until next time, Happy Spring...

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