

Some Less-Common Trees and Shrubs of the Hill Country: Part II.

Last week I wrote about some Hill Country native trees and shrubs that are not rare, but certainly not common. In the process of writing I realized there were more trees and shrubs in that category than I thought, so here are several more.

Bigtooth maple (*Acer grandidentatum*) is the famous tree of Lost Maples State Park. It also grows in parts of Big Bend National Park as well as in deep canyons of Bandera, Kerr, Kendall, Real and Uvalde counties. It is characterized by leaves that are 2 to 3 inches long and wide with three lobes and entire margins. In the fall these trees turn spectacular shades of yellow, orange and red. They have been successfully cultivated in many parts of the state.

Eve's necklace (*Sophora affinis* or *Styphnolobium affine*) is a light and airy small tree that can be found growing a few miles east and west of the Balcones Fault from around here all the way up to the Red River. It is a legume with compound leaves with oval leaflets about an inch long. It produces pale pink flowers in clusters in early spring which make a black leathery seed pod which is constricted between the seeds giving the pod the appearance of a string of beads. Eve's necklace makes an attractive ornamental tree.

Mexican silktassel or Lindheimer's silktassel (*Garrya ovata*) is a multi-trunk evergreen shrub to 12 feet tall. Its leaves are oval and up to about 2 inches long with entire margins. The leaves have a leathery feel and the underside is covered with tiny white hairs. The plant is dioecious, meaning that male and female flowers are on different plants, and the female flowers are pink drooping clusters. It forms dark blue berries.

There are four shrub species in Texas that are called buckeyes. Three of them have palmately-compound leaves (leaflets arrangement like spreading fingers all attached at the tip of the stem). There is some confusion as to which common name goes with which scientific name. I think the correct way to refer to them is: Texas buckeye (*Aesculus glabra* var. *arguta*), Yellow buckeye (*Aesculus pavia* var. *flavescens*), and Red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia* var. *pavia*).

Yellow buckeye is the most common in our area. Its leaves consist of 5 large lanceolate-shaped leaflets with prominent veins. It produces yellow tubular flowers in an upright cluster in early spring. Like the other buckeyes, this shrub produces a triangular shaped dark brown pod containing three glossy brown seeds.

The Mexican buckeye (*Ungnadia speciosa*), was discussed in the previous column, and it has pinnately-compound leaves and pink flowers.

The hop tree or wafer ash (*Ptelea trifoliata*) is a multi-trunk shrub or small tree. It has trifoliate compound leaves with three oval leaflets, sometimes pointed, with the center leaflet being the largest. It produces pale yellow flowers in the spring, followed by seeds in a flat wafer-like semi-transparent membrane. It is in the same family as citrus species.

The toothache tree or tickle tongue, lime prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum hirsutum*) is a thorny shrub or small tree in the same family as the hop tree. It has pinnately-compound leaves with glossy, toothed, wavy leaflets as well as thorns along the twigs and rachis. The leaflets have anesthetic properties and when chewed can numb toothache pain. It is a host plant for the swallowtail butterfly.

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) is a medium to large shrub found mostly in the shade in alluvial soil near creeks. It has simple, alternate oval leaves that turn bright yellow in the fall.

Retama (*Parkinsonia aculeata*) is a small tree or large shrub with unique foot-long leaves sporting tiny leaflets. At the base of each leaf are small sharp thorns. In drought times the retama will drop its leaves and then grow them back after rains. The bark is smooth and green and can carry out photosynthesis like leaves. It blooms throughout the spring and summer with bright yellow flower clusters.

These two columns of less common trees and shrubs are clearly only a small portion of the diverse native vegetation we are fortunate to enjoy here in the Hill Country. It would be quite boring if we only had a handful of plant species.

The deadline for application to the Master Naturalist classes this fall is the June 30. For more information e-mail hillcountrymembership@gmail.com or call 830-329-3738. To apply, go to www.txmn.org/hillcountry.

Until next time...

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