

Rain make the flowers grow

By Rebecca Bracken

It's springtime in Texas, which means it is time for spring flowers! We may not have enjoyed all the thunder and flooding of the past few weeks, but our plants will appreciate the extra water. With much of Texas in a draught the past few years, all this rain will not only help our aquifers but will also help our flowers, trees, and shrubs grow again.

Here in the Houston area, we've already been seeing Indian Paintbrushes. Technically, the species we see is the Texas Indian Paintbrush, which is a member of the Figwort family. Figworts are commonly found in temperate climates, including tropical mountains. Some members of the Figwort family have medicinal uses, but the Texas Indian Paintbrush isn't known to be one of them. The paintbrushes are found in grasslands, open forest clearings, and roadsides.

The Indian Paintbrush is a unique plant called a hemiparasite or root parasite. Its roots grow until it reaches the roots of the surrounding plants, commonly grasses, and then it penetrates the neighboring roots with root tubes to obtain nutrients. Paintbrushes that have roots attached to another plant tend to grow better than one that grows on its own, which makes transplanting paintbrushes difficult. Instead, if you want to grow paintbrushes, plan to pick a dried paintbrush at the end of the season and shake the plant over a piece of paper; fine seeds will come out, which can then spread where you'd like them to grow. The seeds will grow in a variety of soils. If you aren't sure how to collect the seeds, head to your local nursery for advice!

While we don't see them as much here as we do in central Texas, we are starting to see Texas Bluebonnets emerge! The bluebonnet, which is actually a collective name for multiple species, is the state flower of Texas, and as most native Texans know, it is easily recognized and enjoyed. Texas Bluebonnets are commonly found along roadsides and in uncultivated pastures. It is a member of the Pea family, and tends to grow in clusters. I remember heading out each year as a child to take a picture in the bluebonnets with my brother. It was a yearly tradition, until we sat in a fire ant pile that was hiding among the flowers!

Many garden clubs plant bluebonnets in neighborhood gardens and along highways, making them a highly visible and distinctive flower. In fact, bluebonnets have become a kind of floral trademark for Texas since two of the main bluebonnet species are found growing naturally in Texas and nowhere else. It grows incredibly well in well-drained soils, and in areas that do not receive an overabundance of rainfall. It also grows well in raised flower beds, hanging baskets, and wooden barrels, making it an excellent choice when adding a pop of color to your garden!

There are many other flowers that we see around Texas in the spring, but these two have always been my favorite. I've spent many springs away from Texas, and to me, nothing compares to a Texas spring. The abundance and diversity of flowers, from the paintbrushes and bluebonnets to Mexican Hats, Pinkladies, Bluebells, and Lantana and Verbena, is unique to Texas and a sight we cherish every year. I hope you are able to get out and enjoy the spring weather and flowers, and remember, leave no trace! Take only pictures, and make memories, but leave the flowers behind for others to enjoy.

Photo: Bluebonnets at Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary. Photo by Celeste Silling