



## **NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS**

**By John Ferguson**

**A** question I often get asked is why do we want to plant native plants in our landscapes? There are many good reasons why we should use more native plants:

### **Native Plants are low maintenance**

Native plants can tolerate weather extremes from heat waves and droughts to extreme cold with freezing temperatures. Once established they tend to ignore weather extremes. A couple years ago after winter storm Uri had past many of the native plants in our nursery were in full bloom the next day (they just laughed off the winter storm).

Many are perennials hence they return every year saving time and money on replacement.

Natives require use less fertilizer, are more adaptable to different soil types, most are insect and disease resistant hence less toxic chemical are needed, they use less water and grow well even when neglected.

### **Native plants provide food**

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Native plants provide food for our pollinators, from being a host plant for butterfly and moth caterpillars to providing pollen and nectar for the adults.

Native plants often have beautiful flowers from our Redbuds to Magnolias and Buckeyes with dozens more that provide flowers. My Black Locusts (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) are blooming now with clusters of lightly fragrant white flowers which are making the bees happy.

Black Locust also works with microbes in the soil to fix nitrogen taken from the air increasing the soils fertility.

Photo below from Internet



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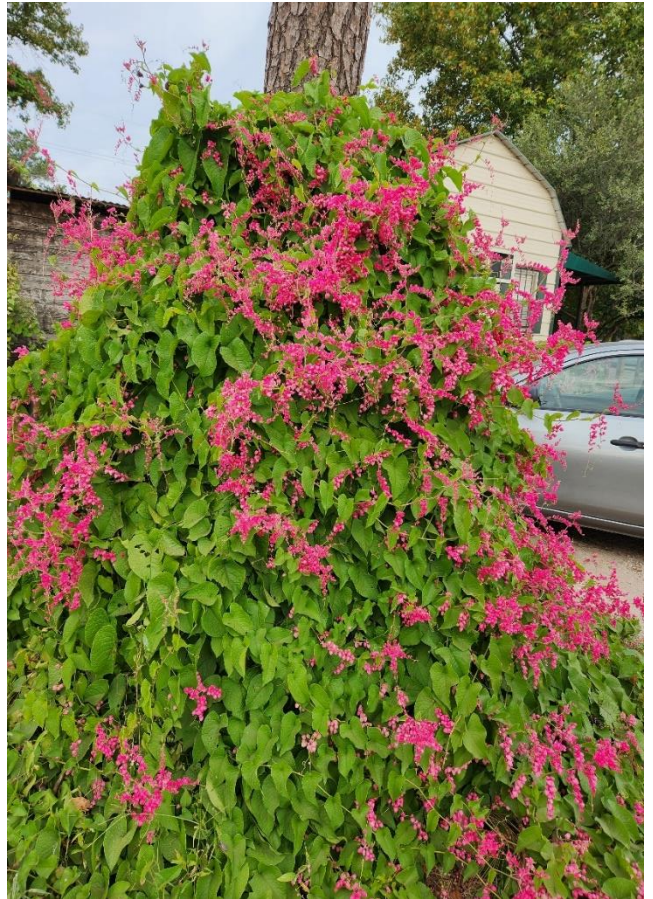
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Texas has one of the largest variety of wildflowers in the country. Wildflowers are native plants and driving through the LaGrange area yesterday, the fields of Bluebonnets and Indian Paintbrushes were very breath taking.

The Coral Vine from South Texas is not only beautiful, it is a favorite of honey bees and fully hardy in our area. The photo below is from outside our sales office last year. We have several growing in our nursery including the snow-white form.

Native plants in addition to being tough and beautiful they providing vital habitat for birds and many other species of wildlife benefits as well. The colorful array of butterflies and moths, including our iconic monarch, the swallowtails, tortoiseshells, and beautiful blues, are all dependent on very specific native plant species as they only lay their eggs on certain species.



Native plants provide nectar for pollinators including hummingbirds, native bees, butterflies, moths, and bats. They provide protective shelter for many mammals and other wildlife. The native nuts, seeds, and fruits produced by these plants offer essential foods for all forms of wildlife.

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Many native plants are edible and have much higher nutrition density than many of our common vegetables. These range from edible greens to nopales made from the prickly pear cactus. The prickly pear fruits also make a delicious jelly or wine and are food for wildlife.

Many of our native plants produce fruits than can be made into delicious jams, jellies, wines, etc. One of my favorites is May Haw jelly (*Crataegus opaca*). Texas has several species of wild plums that are delicious.

Texas also has five different sub-species of Black Cherry growing in different regions. If you ever visit Natives of Texas Nursery outside of Kerrville, they have escarpment Black Cherries growing on the property that are over 50 feet tall.

<https://www.nativesoftexas.com/>

In addition, we have many nut bearing trees that have edible nuts. The state tree is one of my favorites, especially in pecan pie.

### **Many native plants have beautiful fall color**

The photo below is our native Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) in front of our sales office from last fall.

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### **Native Plants Provide Environmental Benefits**

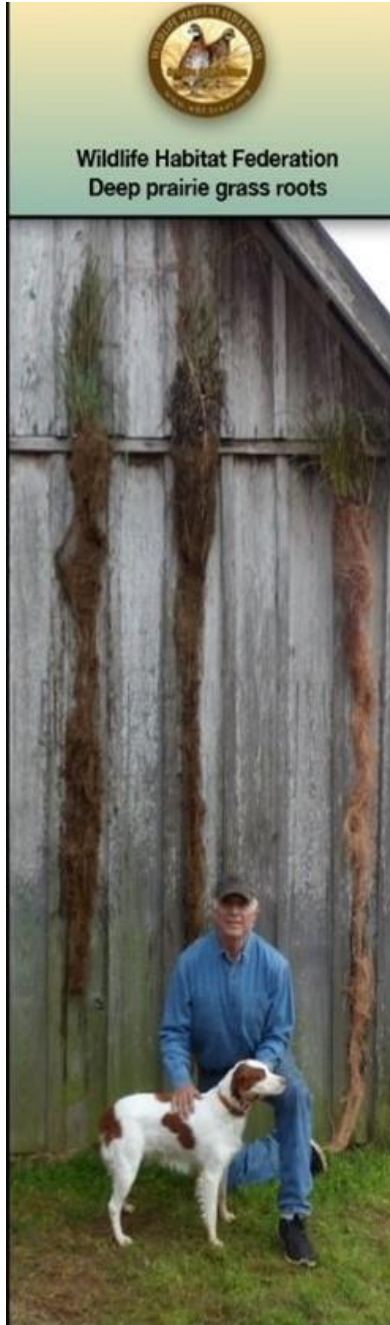
Native plants help fight climate change by removing carbon dioxide from the air and storing carbon in the soils and in their roots.

Native grasses have roots that can grow over 12 feet deep. In addition to storing carbon, they open the soil so that rain water can be absorbed and they prevent erosion.

Photo below from Wildlife Habitat Federation.

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### **For more information**

The Audubon Society has a database where one can type in your zip code and find out which natives work in your area to attract birds: <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>

The Native Plant Society of Texas has many local chapters where the members will be glad to help you and their website has lots of information.

[www.npsot.org](http://www.npsot.org)

Texas is considered a drought prone state and we are running out of cheap water from our aquifers. To protect our future, we need to conserve water and use other environmentally friendly options. That is why just a few years ago the State of Texas passed a law that gives homeowners living in an HOA community more control over landscaping their yard with water-saving alternatives like our native plants.

The Woodlands Township is offering a 50% rebate up to \$300 per year for those whom purchase drought tolerant native plants. They also have pictures and cultural information that one can download. [www.woodlandswater.org](http://www.woodlandswater.org)

Another example is the state of Minnesota which is now paying homeowners up to \$500 per home to remove their grass lawns and plant Urban Meadows (native grasses, forbs, and wildflowers).

Below are a few links to the statutes itself and a few articles on the subject one might find interesting:

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<https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/PR/htm/PR.202.htm>

<https://spectrumam.com/xeriscaping-and-your-texas-hoa/>

<https://communityimpact.com/austin/news/2013/07/15/xeriscaping-can-no-longer-be-prohibited-by-homeowners-associations/>

**Senate Bill 198 (2013) – Protection of Drought-Resistant Landscaping and Water-Conserving Natural Turf (also HB 449 – 2013)**

“SB 198 modifies Section 202.007 of the Texas Property Code. Section 202.007 restricts HOAs from enforcing a provision of a Dedicatory Instrument that would prohibit or restrict a Homeowner from using drought-resistant landscaping or water-conserving natural turf on his or her property. A HOA may still require a Homeowner to obtain pre-approval of such landscaping or turf from the HOA to ensure, to the extent practicable, maximum aesthetic compatibility of such landscaping or turf with other landscaping in the subdivision, but a HOA’s approval

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