

Some Notes on *Crotalaria sagittalis* By Carl R. Amason

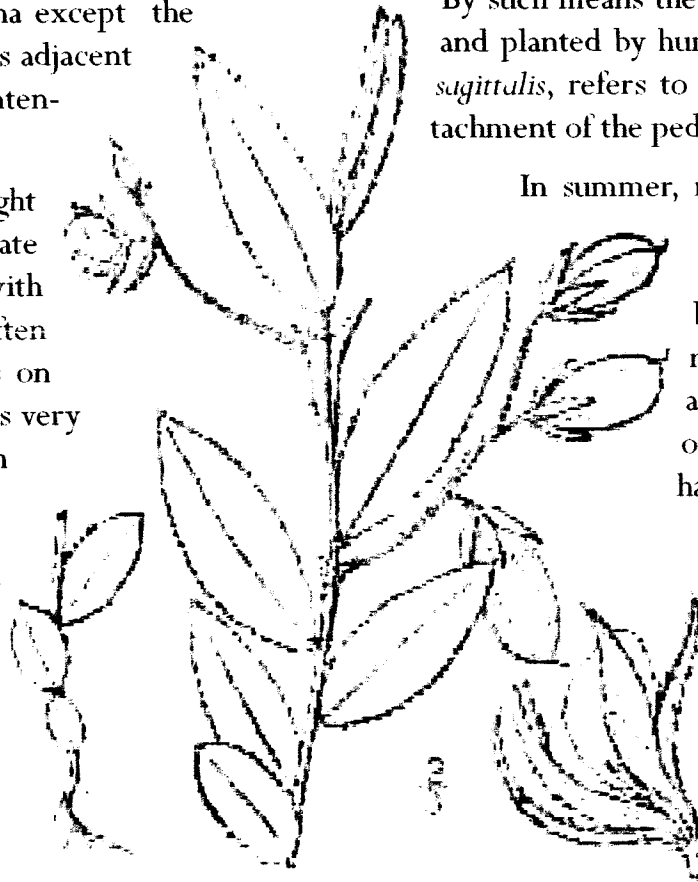
One of the pleasant wildflowers of the Western Gulf Coastal Plains is *Crotalaria sagittalis* even if it isn't very conspicuous. It is a perennial and has a charming way of endearing itself to the observer. It grows along dry sunny roadsides and in edges of sandy pine woods. The plants can be found in most parishes of Louisiana except the Delta, the real swampy areas adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico, or intensively cultivated areas.

It grows six to eight inches tall and blooms in late spring or early summer with bright yellow flowers, often with three to six blossoms on each plant. The flower looks very much like a peanut blossom which is typical of the Fabaceae subfamily of the Leguminosa or Bean Family group. However, the peduncle doesn't push the developing seed pod underground but pods develop like most other beans or peas. The developing pods are green but turn bright black on ripening. The small, enclosed seeds will break off their attachment but stay inside the shell, giving rise to the common names of "rattlebox," "kitty-cat bells," or just plain "cat bells." The rattling apparently sounded like a rattlesnake as that species of snake is scientifically *Crotalus*.

Before toys became plentiful, children would

play with the ripe pods to listen to the rattling, which isn't loud but children's imaginations are big. They played with the tiny rattles until the pods ruptured, releasing seeds and leaving a surprised child holding only the empty halves of the pod connected by their point of attachment to the plant.

By such means the plants are often scattered and planted by humans. The specific name, *sagittalis*, refers to the arrowhead shaped attachment of the pedicle to the stem.



In summer, maintenance crews of the country roadsides frequently mow the plants but since they are perennial, they will grow back and produce a second crop of "cat bells." Because they have deep taproots, they would be difficult to transplant into a wildflower garden. Also, it probably takes more than a year to grow a flowering plant to maturity under ordinary circumstances. Therefore, this is another of the distinct plants of our area that is best to enjoy in their natural setting.

Crotalaria sagittalis is said to be poisonous to most browsing animals and damages from deer have not been observed. Some related Oriental species are grown for soil enrichment and as a green manure crop.

Going Native: Medium Trees

by Jimmy Culpepper

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Last month, I recommended small native trees that work well in the Gulf States. This month, let's take a look at medium-sized (20 to 25 feet in height at maturity) native trees that can add a variety of form, texture, and function to the landscape.

Evergreen Sweetbay Magnolia

(*Magnolia virginiana* var. *australis*)

This wonderful evergreen tree has a 3-inch, creamy white, lemon-scented spring blooms. Another outstanding landscape feature is its silvery leaf undersides, which are revealed on a breezy day. Reaching an average height of 30 to 40 feet, sweetbay magnolia is a great choice for a patio or small garden. This tree has an upright form, a moderate rate of growth, and medium to coarse texture. It can handle just about any type of site; wet, dry, sun or partial shade. Sweetbay magnolia is an excellent food source for numerous species of birds, including vireos and towhees, and is also a larval plant for swallowtail butterflies.

Laurel Oak (*Quercus laurifolia*)

This semi-evergreen tree reaches a height of 30 to 40 feet. It has a round form, moderate rate of growth, and medium texture. Laurel oak prefers full sun and tolerates a wide variety of soils. It is an excellent substitute for live oak when space is limited. Small mammals and songbirds eat its acorns.

Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)

Usually 25 to 30 feet at maturity, this deciduous tree prefers full sun to partial shade. It has a coarse texture, moderate rate of growth, and prefers dry, acidic soil. Sassafras has outstanding fall color with leaves turning orange, red, and yellow. Fruits on female trees are a favorite of robins and swallowtail butterflies. The leaves are also the source of file (a seasoning for gumbo), and the roots are used to make tea. Sassafras has three distinct aromatic leaf shapes; one- and two-lobed "mittens" and oval. It's an ideal selection for a small urban garden.

Silverbell (*Halesia diptera*)

Growing to a mature height of 25 to 30 feet, this deciduous tree has 1-inch, white, bell-shaped spring blooms that hang below the foliage. Silverbell has strong horizontal branching similar to dogwood with leaves turning a bright yellow in the fall. It tolerates heavier soils and is much easier to grow than dogwood. Silverbell grows at a moderate rate and prefers partial to full shade exposure in moist, rich, acidic soils.

Sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*)

Reaching a mature height of 30 to 40 feet, this deciduous tree prefers well-drained, acidic, rich, moist to dry soil. Sourwood has an oval form, a medium to coarse texture, and prefers full sun to partial shade exposure. The bloom is a cluster of fragrant, creamy white, bell-shaped blooms on curvy spikes. Leaves are pink in the spring and turn scarlet in the fall. The tree attracts deer, turkey, songbirds, and butterflies. Sourwood is easy to propagate from seeds.

Southern Sugar Maple

(*Acer barbatum*)

This deciduous tree has outstanding orange, scarlet, and salmon fall color. It has an upright form, medium texture, and slow to moderate rate of growth. This maple prefers a well-drained, moist soil with lots of organic matter or leaf litter, and full sun or shade exposure. Seeds ripen in late summer/early fall and are used by orioles and song sparrows.

Winged Elm (*Ulmus alata*)

This deciduous tree has a round form, medium to fine texture, and a fast rate of growth. It's an excellent choice to shade a patio area or a small pond due to its fast growth, small leaves (less litter), and unusual corky growth along branches or "wings." Winged elm has yellow fall leaf color and small, reddish spring blooms, which serve as an excellent food source for wildlife. Its dense canopy is appealing as a nesting site for various species of birds. Winged elm is adaptable to a wide variety of sites and prefers full sun to partial shade.

Jimmy Culpepper is the owner of Greener Trees, an urban forestry and tree care consulting firm in Greenwell Springs, LA



Sourwood

Events of Interest:.....**Oct 8-10: Cajun Prairie Fall Meeting plus Arboretum Tour:** *Charles Allen* (337-328-2252) native@camtel.net**Oct 14-17: Texas Native Plant Society** joint meeting with LNPS.**Oct. 22-23: 17th Annual Southern Garden Symposium**, St. Francisville. 225-635-3738**Nov. 5-6: Central South Native Plant Conference**, Birmingham Botanical Gardens, 205-414-3950 or www.bbgardens.orgContact Friends of LSU Hilltop Arboretum, 225-767-6916, email: hilltop@lsu.edu, Website: www.lsu.edu/hilltop about the following Events:**Oct. 16, Sat: Fall Hike** with Natural Heritage Botanist Chris Reid at Lake Ramsey and Sandy Hollow near Folsom.**Oct 31, Sun: Hilltop Fall Garden Tour** in Baton Rouge.**Nov. 13: Backyard Habitats** by Jimmy Culpepper.**Dec. 11, Sat: The Winter Garden** by Johnny Mayronne.Contact Louisiana State Arboretum, Ville Platte, 337--363-2403, arboretum_mgr@crt.state.la.us about the following events:**Bird Hike**, second Saturday of every month & **Guided Hike**, first Sunday of every month.**Oct. 23: Woodpeckers of Louisiana**, 10 am.**Oct. 30: Signs of Wildlife Hike**, 2 pm.**Nov. 6: Evergreens**, 2 pm.**Nov. 27: Leaves of Change**, 2 pm.**Dec. 4: Mistletoe Madness**, 2 pm.**Dec. 18: Mushroom Hike**, 2 pm.

LNPS Annual Meeting – February 4-6, 2005

Camp Hardtner, Pollock, LA

We have a new Annual Meeting location -- Camp Hardtner! The Camp is located in the beautiful piney woods of central Louisiana, north of Pollock, LA. Fishing is available in the pond at the Camp and there is a wonderful deck that overlooks the pond where visiting and drinking coffee will be very nice. No boats are allowed, and alcoholic beverages are not permitted on the grounds.

There are no building rental fees or insurance costs this year; and therefore, no registration fee will be required. There will be a potluck dinner Friday night – kitchen privileges are not available but there is a refrigerator/freezer that we can use. The costs for lodging and food are shown below.

Lodging in dormitory style cabins, with bath facilities,

but bring own linens is \$15 per person. Motel type rooms available at \$40 single or \$60 double. Two houses are available at \$100 and \$150.

Meals are available Saturday at \$5.50 for breakfast and \$6.50 for lunch.

Our President, Jimmy Culpepper, has lined us several **speakers**. Charles Allen will discuss Edible Plants.

David Lewis will talk on "How Mycorrhizal Relates to Plants and Major Types of Mushrooms and Their Function." Dennis Eilers with Louisiana Office of Tourism and State Parks will present plans and progress on some new concepts of state parks that are being developed near Toledo Bend, Tunica Hills, and Bogue Chitto.

The Louisiana Native Plant Society was founded in 1983 as a state-wide, non-profit organization.

Its purposes are:

to preserve and study native plants and their habitats.

to educate people on the value of native plants and the need to preserve and protect rare and endangered species.

to promote the propagation and use of native plants in the landscape

to educate people on the relationship between our native flora and wildlife.

Membership form:**Checks payable to LNPS.**

Name _____ phone _____ Email address _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Annual dues: Student/Senior \$5 _____ Individual \$10 _____ Family \$15 _____
 Organization \$25 _____ Sustaining \$50 _____ Corporate \$100 _____

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native@camtel.net

Dillemath, Bob, 5848 Guava Dr, Baton Rouge,
70808, *rdillemath@eatel.net*

Foret, Jim, 7766 Main Hwy, St. Martinville, 70582,
possumforet@hotmail.com

Gibbs, Sandra, 1184 Hall Rd, Logansport, 71049,
lawildthings@cs.com

Johnson, Jessie, 216 Caroline Dormon Road,
Saline, 71070, *cdnprj@wmconnect.com*

Robinson, Jim, 4213 Chicot Park Rd, Ville Platte,
LA, 70586, *arboretum_mgr@crt.state.la.us*

Seidenberg, Charlotte, 816 Upperline St, New
Orleans, LA 70115-1721, *c.seidenberg@cox.net*

Webb, Rick, 63279 Lowery Road, Amite, LA 70422-
5151, *rwebb@l-55.com*

Young, Jr., Herbert, PO Box 8281, Monroe LA,
71211-8281, *botany07@bellsouth.net*

LNPS Officers

Culpepper, Jimmy, *President*, 15820 Greensboro
Dr, Greenwell Springs, LA, 70739,
peppercul@aol.com

Banowetz, Tracey, *Vice-president*, PO Box 10,
Weyanoke, LA 70787-0010,
banowetz@bellsouth.net

Duncan, Jacalyn, *Treasurer*, 114 Harpers Ferry Rd,
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Milton, Kent & Sonie, *News Editors*, 2906 Highway
457, Alexandria, LA, 71302,
polandtrees@aol.com (318) 442-0026

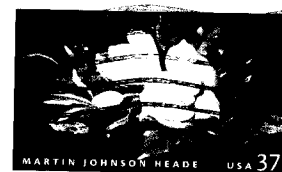
Welcome to New Members:

Julie King, Welsh; Lynn R. Haase, Covington; Gordon & Laura Oussat, McNeill, MS; Janet Mighell, Dr. Dave Creech, Shreveport; Dave Patton, Lafayette; Margo Racca, Iowa; Scott Simmons, New Orleans.

Miscellaneous notes:

If you would like to be on the LNPS email group, contact Tracey Banowetz at *Banowetz@bellsouth.net*.

LOUISIANA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
2906 HWY 457
ALEXANDRIA, LA. 71302



Larry Raymond

6675 N Park Cir
Shreveport LA 71107-9539