

Calling All Native Plant People!

While Americans heartily approve of efforts to restore natural habitats, they almost unanimously forbid "wild" plants on their own property. Here in the Southeast, landscaping usually consists of well-manicured lawn grass, crepe myrtles, Sago Palms, and flowering non-native annuals. Homeowner Associations (HOA's) in many subdivisions impose strict sanctions against anyone who departs from conventional standards by growing tall wildflowers or a no-lawn front yard.

Recently, the Cooperative Extension Service, a federal program, has begun educating the public about using native plants as an integral part of sustainability. Extension personnel recommend planting native trees for wildlife, erosion control, soil detoxification, shade creation, and aesthetic value.

Native-plant cheerleaders support this effort yet realize that they probably won't be seeing goldenrods in their neighbors' yards any time soon. We wildflower enthusiasts, especially, hear repeatedly that if a plant "grows everywhere," then it must not be landscape-worthy. It's true that Trumpet Creeper (*Campsis radicans*) and other native vines can grow a mile a minute in summer. But if they are controlled by occasional pruning, they require far less maintenance than lawn grass. Until someone invents a gas-powered riding vine pruner, however, average homeowners will never grant mercy to beautiful native vines and other indigenous species that volunteer in their yards.

Anyone who promotes native plants over lawn-centered landscapes will quickly encounter a very solid wall of disapproval. How can we NPP convince people that they can replace, or at least modify, traditional landscapes with native plants or natural plant communities? Seeing is believing. Gardeners who live in a world of sod and introduced species cannot envision any other way.

The answer to this prejudice against nature's design may lie with volunteer landscapers, both professionals and amateurs, who create native display "gardens" in public places: shopping mall parking lots, fast food restaurants, and other areas where people walk.

Once people see for themselves the incredible beauty and adaptability of wonderful native plants, they will no longer settle for outdated landscapes that rely on machines and chemicals.

If I could transport my own front yard right now, full of Partridge Pea (*Cassia fasciculata*) and Rattlesnake Master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), to the median of the local main street, the sight would cause more than a few people to stop their cars and try to dig up the plants. The *Cassia* have been blooming for many

weeks now, from most of July into August, with no sign of slowing down. Each of the 3 to 5-foot tall plants has dozens of bright gold flowers. So many bumblebees light on the blooms that the stems sway constantly from their weight. The air literally hums with the happy droning of the bees as they collect pollen.

I encourage the little band of NPP to join the campaign by speaking and working in defense of native plants. To advance the cause of sustainable landscaping will not be an easy task, but it is assuredly a labor of love. And next spring, think about planting a few seeds of *Cassia* where passers-by can appreciate them.

Submitted by Betty Miley

GO WILD IN THE BIG THICKET!

**2008 NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY OF TEXAS
ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM
OCTOBER 16 – 19, 2008
BEAUMONT, TEXAS**

Hosted by:

NPSOT Beaumont, Houston, and Pineywoods Chapters, the Louisiana Native Plant Society, and the Big Thicket Association

Experience the wondrous diversity of the Big Thicket. This is an opportunity like none you've been offered before --a chance to explore the richest ecosystem in the country. October 16, 17, 18 & 19, 2008

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From the Archives: The Genus *Eryngium*

The genus of *Eryngium* is a large group of cosmopolitan plants found in many parts of the Old and New Worlds. It belongs to the Apiaceae family that used to be known as Umbelliferae. This is the family that includes such umbel bearing plants as Queen Anne's Lace and water penny, *Hydrocotyle* sp. Cultivated family members are carrot, celery, and some ornamentals. The family contains some poisonous plants. Water hemlock, *Cicuta maculata*, is an exotic that is frequently found growing wild in Louisiana. This is a family of botanical characters, and our subject plant, *Eryngium yuccifolium*, is certainly no exception. It is found in almost all of the Louisiana parishes except the Delta Lands along the Mississippi River. A colleague on frequent field trips, Joe Stucky of Texarkana, Arkansas, has aptly described it as a dicot that thinks it is a monocot. The common name is button snakeroot. Apparently, this is a name that goes back into Indian lore, when so many plants were used in some manner for snake bites. I do not know how it was used for snake bites. Snake bites must have been a common thing among the American Indians as there are so many plants with "snake" as part of their common name.

Eryngium yuccifolium grows in sunny to partially shady ditches or open woodlands where there is some seasonal moisture, but a dry summer. The umbels are compressed into small heads at the ends of stems that have leaves with parallel veining and usually a winter rosette of leaves. These winter leaves are about three to five inches long with soft bristly edges. In fact and in fancy, the leaves do have some appearance to some yucca seedlings. As warm weather progresses, the thin leaves grow long and narrow. They grow ten to twelve inches long and a half inch wide, in bunches of six to ten. A stem comes from the center, and it usually grows to two feet in height, bearing some leaves, with several branches at the top. Each branch ends in a terminal flower cluster that is greenish in color, never really developing any bright color at all. The flower heads are roughly one inch long and about as half wide. They are composed of individual flowers that barely open. They are more interesting than beautiful. A single plant will develop root stolons. In a year or so, there will be several stems developing. It is not an invasive plant, but its flowering appearance is enhanced by any colorful flowering plant nearby. It is easily transplanted from a wild population into a garden setting. Its major requirement seems to be well drained sandy type soil in a sunny place. As often as I have seen this plant, I haven't seen it bothered by an insect, nor have I seen butterflies, bees, or hummingbirds use it as a food source. I have not seen it browsed by white-tailed deer or rabbits.

This article was written by the late Carl Amason. It was first published in the LNPS Newsletter, Vol 15, No. 2, Spring 1997 issue.

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Members Witness Exploding Yeatesia

by Linda Chance & Annette Parker

Yeatesia viridiflora, Yellow Bractspike or Green flowered Yeatesia, was recently found to eject its disc-shaped, tawny flat seeds for distances of 3 feet or more when the early summer sun strikes the maturing oblong pods. The eruption was definitely audible and a puff of dust was visible. When the event was examined closely, it was apparently caused by the seed capsule forcefully expelling most of its contents when splitting along 2 lateral seams.

Plant Description

Family & rank: *Yeatesia viridiflora* belongs to the Shrimp Plant family, Acanthaceae, with a middling G3G5 global occurrence ranking, but no LA state rare designation as of yet.

Range: This long blooming native can be found in only 5 parishes in LA: Acadia, Bienville, Jefferson Davis, Rapides, and Sabine. It occurs only sporadically within its range in the very deep south. This herbaceous perennial can be found in a scant 15 counties in 6 states on the Gulf coast from TX to FL, plus GA. Yet where it occurs it may be locally abundant.

Habitat: This is an upright perennial that can be found growing as a ground cover or understory plant colony in high shade or part sun. Yellow Bractspike prefers moist pinelands, flood zones and stream banks. Since it has a preference for damper sites, it has a FACW or facultative wetland designation.

Physical appearance: This low-growing herbaceous perennial – 1 to 2 feet - is a glaucous (smooth) or slightly fuzzy plant with a 3-angled branched or unbranched stem. Sometimes the area along the stem where the leaves occur, called leaf nodes, are swollen and indented, especially in dry conditions, making the plant appear jointed.

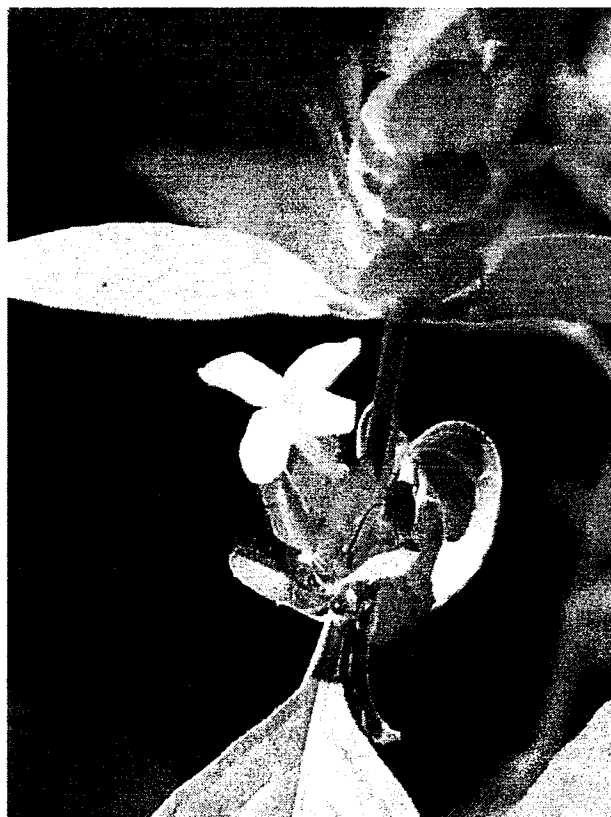


Yeatesia viridiflora (continued from page 3)**Plant Details**

Leaves: Yeatesia leaves are cauline, that is, they occur along the stalk opposite each other with only short petioles attaching them to the stem. The bright to medium green leaves measure about 5 inches long and 2 inches wide. They have a broad lance-like shape that gradually tapers into the attachment on the stem. The leaf surface feels smooth on the bottom and slightly fuzzy (pubescent) on top. The rather thin leaves are wholly without lobes or teeth along their edges.

Flowers: The bloom time for Yeatesia begins in late April, peaking in May and June. It continues flowering throughout the summer and fitfully into midfall. This species should be noted for its misnomer. Yellow Bractspike or Green flowered Yeatesia has numerous, 5/8-inch flowers that are definitely pristine white in color instead of green or yellow. Although subtended by a 5-parted green calyx (the outermost flower part), the tubed white flowers are unlike most others in their family, having only 4 – not 5 – equal lobes and only 2 stamens. Each diminutive flower is supported by conspicuous, ½ to 1-inch long triangular leaf like bracts. The entire compact flower spike is held aloft at the tip of each branch. Each plant starts out with a single terminal flower cluster and gradually produces 4 to 6 more inflorescences from the upper leaf axils (the area on the stem immediately above each leaf) before the season ends.

Seeds: Yeatesia viridiflora seeds are held in flattened, blunt-pointed, ½ inch oblong capsules. A keel is lined up on both the top and bottom of the capsule perhaps playing a role in later seed distribution. Four smooth, 1/8th inch yellowish-tan, flattened seeds are forcefully ejected off their persistent, hook-shaped stalks after the capsule dries enough to turn tan in the summer heat. As described above, the surprising event performs remarkably well in spreading out the plant colony. Altogether this unusual plant provides a delightful summer and fall experience, repeating itself year after year.



Life in a Dead Tree

Tracey Banowetz

For a dead tree in a small family cemetery, the old cedar was full of life. Towering over fifty feet tall, its massive trunk and still-sturdy limbs served as a giant trellis for virginia creeper, poison ivy, and spanish moss. The smaller limbs and crevasses were visited by nearly every species of woodpecker in the parish with the exception of the red-headed. Pileateds, red-bellies, hairies, downies, and flickers all dined on the insects which in turn were feasting on the dead wood or simply keeping house in the cracks.

The first morning light would hit the branches, drawing in birds from the surrounding woods. It was our most dependable spot for good birding: summer tanagers, indigo buntings, rose breasted grosbeaks, and numerous warblers were just a few of our favorite sightings.

An old piece of tin nailed over a knot-hole some six feet up the trunk protected an active honey bee hive. On hot summer days, it sounded as if a small engine was running deep within the tree as thousands of bees worked to keep the hive cool. Steadily they traveled, from hive to flower and back, performing their magical process of pollinating both the vegetable and flower gardens. We were grateful for the bounty they provided.

On Monday afternoon, as Hurricane Gustav passed with unmerciful slowness, the old dead cedar came down in a single, quick fall that shook the house. Miraculously the nearby barn and equipment inside were not crushed. The same can't be said about the adjacent garden and deck.

Two days later, I still can't bring myself to examine the fallen tree too closely. It feels somehow irreverent to be able to walk right up and touch limbs that were once clearly visible only through binoculars. A headstone rests sideways on the rootball, some four feet above ground. The grave itself is not too badly exposed. The bees seem discombobulated, but still they come and go, from hive to flower, back to the hive. Cardinals, wrens, chickadees, and titmice continue to flit within the moss looking for food. Life goes on in the old dead cedar tree.

Keep Up With All The Latest Native Plant Activities!

Looking for something to do? See the back page of this newsletter for just a few of the upcoming events of interest to native plant lovers. For even more great events, check out these web sites: www.lnps.org, www.lsu.edu/hilltop, and www.friendslaarb.org. To get your favorite event posted on the LNPS web site, just send an email to our webmaster, Doug Miller at thedesign@bigthe.com.

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: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

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

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Events of Interest to LNPS Members (for details visit our web site at www.LNPS.org):

Oct. 4 – 5: Hilltop Arboretum Annual Plant Sale, Baton Rouge, LA www.lsu.edu/hilltop

Oct. 7 - 10: Eastern Native Grass Symposium, Columbia, SC

Oct. 16 - 19: Texas Native Plant Society meeting in Beaumont, TX www.npsotreg.org

For what's happening at the **Louisiana State Arboretum** in Ville Platte, visit www.friendslaarb.org.

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SEP

Dues Expire On: 12/31/2008

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Please check the expiration date on your label. If the date is earlier than 10/08, your dues are now due. If your dues have expired, this may be your last issue of the newsletter. Membership form is on pg.5