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LOUISIANA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Inside this Issue:

- 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

Louisiana Certified Habitat Update
5 Year Reflection

by Janie Braud

On a rare occasion an organization makes a move that is transformative. It is my opinion that in 2020, the Louisiana Native Plant Society made a transformative move with the initiation of the Louisiana Certified Habitat program (LCH). In those 5 years, 433 habitats are proudly displaying the LCH sign. Why is that important? 433 property owners have made the decision that supporting wildlife through planting native is important. Countless others, through conversations or seeing signage, now have awareness that what plants they choose to place in their yard matters. Butterflies, bees, moths, frogs, lizards, birds and even snakes are also "happier". There is a growing human awareness of the value of sharing Earth's resources.

The initial start-up of the LCH program was generated by an idea from Phyllis Griffard (Acadiana Native Plant Project, ANPP) as a response from seeing a multitude of yard signages from other organizations (i.e. Monarch Watch, National Wildlife Federation, Homegrown National Park, No Spray Zone). Her thought – why not have a homegrown one for Louisiana? Several months later – team LNPS was ironing out the details. Kudos to many that were involved, but if you need a steamroller to get something done, Phyllis Griffard and Tammany Baumgarten are your gals! With input from others, decisions were made to establish criteria for bronze, silver, and gold levels of certification to demonstrate biodiversity through the number of species. The team also wanted to include a focus on conservation that included attention to water, land, and wildlife, not just plants.

The team also decided it wouldn't just be a checkbox honor system as some national organizations have, where people pay and have a sign mailed to them. LCH would include a personal visit to not only verify but also make connections

Louisiana Certified Habitat Update: 5 Year Reflection *cont.*

to new members of the native plant community and take pictures for social media. The site visits were a lifeline for many in the first year(s) because of COVID. So many applicants had not been able to socialize with their fellow gardeners or socialize at all. The garden visits really provided a relieving social connection at an otherwise stressful, unhappy time. What would have been a 30-minute visit became hour-long show-and-tells that were therapeutic for both certifier and applicant. People love to show off their hard work, special plants and just be with another that gets them, and that was hard to come by during COVID. Visitations continue to be an important part of the certification process. The time is often extended due to the reciprocal sharing of plant knowledge, sharing resources to get more plants, and all the commonalities that like-minded people have.

The application was constructed, and a thorough checklist of Louisiana natives most likely to end up in landscaping was compiled. The brochures and sign were professionally designed by Melita Glorioso of Lafayette. Bill and Lydia Fontenot received the FIRST certification as they helped vet the process and by August of 2020, there were 30 LCH properties.

We didn't have to wait too long or look very far to see further success. Tracey and Dave Banowetz of Abita Springs were featured in the LNPS April 2021 Newsletter – "How We Turned a Barren Construction Site into a Gold Level Habitat in Less than One Year". To read the full article, visit LNPS website, Newsletter Archive. https://www.lnps.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Volume34Issue1.pdf
LNPS maintains a Google database, that includes a map of certified properties. (Thank you, Robby Maxwell). LNPS partners with cooperating organizations to administer the certification program within their geographical region. Yes, it could be said that there may be a little healthy competition to see which area can get more on the map! Someone recently pointed out that the Native Plant Initiative of Greater New Orleans (NPI) was about to reach 200 properties! NPI administers applications from the eastern part of the state, Friends of Hilltop Arboretum administers parishes around Baton Rouge, ANPP administers those from parishes in the Southwest corner, and LNPS itself administers all the rest.

It is no surprise that the LNPS Certified Habitat Program has been recognized regionally. Tammany Baumgarten and Phyllis Griffard were invited to speak at the Cullowhee Native Plant Conference in summer 2023. They have also presented the LCH program at the Hilltop Discover Nature Program in Baton Rouge and for the Mississippi Native Plant Society. It is interesting that LNPS had made an early decision to NOT require society membership as a prerequisite for certification as other state programs do. The result – Louisiana has comparatively an extraordinary number of certified properties! Other national organizations use programs such as this for marketing and fundraising, for which LNPS certainly has benefited, but these were not the reasons for launching the LCH program.

To recognize the 5-year anniversary of the LCH program, your LNPS Newsletter Editors sent out a Google Survey to the 76 property owners that certified in 2020. We would like to share some of the responses:

How would you describe your property?

Undeveloped, natural – 14.3 %
Landscaped garden – 42.9%
Mixed undeveloped natural and landscaped garden – 42.9%

One-half of the certified properties are in an urban setting, while the other half describe their surroundings as woodlands or grasslands.

How is your garden doing now?

Overwhelming response was "thriving" with one "maintaining" and one "mixed results".

One responder said "Thriving. We've left many of the perennials to duke it out. Some have overtaken others but for the most part we are okay with letting things find their balance.

Louisiana Certified Habitat Update: 5 Year Reflection *cont.*

Has maintenance gotten easier or harder over time? What maintenance tasks require the most ongoing attention (weeding, pruning, watering?)

> Some said easier, with pruning and weeding being the predominant task. One respondent has had trouble with bush killer vine and golden rain tree seedlings. I can relate to that as I have pulled bush killer vines so thick you could not even tell what was underneath.
>
> LNPS President, Lawrence Rozas, said "Maintenance overall at my place has gotten easier because I've reduced the lawn area considerably (now only 17% of total area), but when additional areas of lawn are converted to native plant gardens, those newly converted gardens require more weeding, which declines in intensity over time. Weeding requires the most time, and some time is required for light pruning. Watering requires little time except for newly planted vegetation during extended dry conditions."

This is a great reminder that reducing the lawn is one of the best ways to increase native biodiversity. Most responders noted that they have added to their number of species since certification.

Are there any plant species that you would consider your "rock-stars"? (such as hardy, eye-catching, long-lasting blooms, or spread some but not overly aggressive)

> swamp sunflower, iron weed, beautyberry, bee-balm, coreopsis, Indian pink, salvia, Turk's cap, oak leaf hydrangea, swamp titi, Carolina buck-thorn, and Virginia sweet spire.

Favorite trees and shrubs include:

> cypress, sycamore, Nuttall oak, viburnum, native azalea, silver bell, catalpa, Mexican plum, Carolina buckthorn, yaupon, and native azalea.

Karen Pinsonat leaves a wildflower area of the landscape left alone. "I joke that this area is sponsored by Mutual of Omaha (you have to be over a certain age to understand that). We leave it wild to do its own thing. In spring, we have clasping coneflower, a couple of different coreopsis, partridge pea, and some sedges. Now, we have a new species of goldenrod growing there that we never had before, and a couple of new native nightshades."

Plant and they will come!. Many *wildlife visitors* were noted – the most surprising was that two people had 3-toed box turtles, and Bette J. Kauffman had a mating pair! All enjoyed birds, bees, and butterflies. A few have red foxes and Wendy Rihner likes the thread-waisted wasps. Karen Pinsonat said " You name it, we have it. From many species of arthropods, to raccoons, opossums, rabbits, wood ducks, even red fox, bobcats and coyotes." Susan Hester Edmunds has painted buntings that overwinter in her bamboo grove.

I love reading the responses about how much joy plants bring to us all seasons of the year. Donna Caire said, " My gardens bring love and support to my visitors. They feel the energy of a lively varied garden". Donna especially enjoys winter, "I like sitting on the patio and enjoying the quiet plants that no longer need my attention - except to appreciate them."

The list of favorite plants for each season was numerous. Each species almost seems to take a turn so that viewers have something of interest all year long. Of course, the reasoning lies far deeper than pleasing us -- - years of natural selection/evolution in the ecosystem that challenges and supports each.

I am appreciative of the 2020 Certified Habitat property owners that contributed to the survey.

I would also like to recognize the 2020 LNPS Board of Directors that initiated the groundwork for the highly successful LCH program: President – Brian Early, Vice-President – Tammany Baumgarten, Treasurer – Jackie Duncan, Secretary – Chris Doffitt

Louisiana Certified Habitat Update: 5 Year Reflection *cont.*

BEFORE

Lawrence Rozas home in 2003.

AFTER

Lawrence Rozas home in 2025.

Karen Pinsonat's property in 2020.

Karen Pinsonat's property in 2025.

Janie Braud's suburban yard in 2020.

Janie Braud's suburban yard in 2025.

Ivyleaf Thoroughwort (*Chromolaena ivifolia* L.)

By Wendy Rihner

Fall's purple blooms, like Asters and Ironweed, remind me that cooler temps are on the way. Yet, come August, I also look forward to the blooming of Ivyleaf Thoroughwort (*Chromolaena ivifolia).* (Prior to 1970 known as *Eupatorium ivifolium*). This perennial is a pollinator magnet in my garden, starting in August, when many other plants look like they need a break, until early November. It is native to North America and Argentina, occurring in eastern Texas, Louisiana, southern Alabama, and Florida. In Louisiana, it is found in the parishes north of Lake Pontchartrain, the southwestern parishes stretching north into Rapides Parish. In fact, the genus Chromolaena occurs nowhere else in the US but in the Gulf Coast states. There are only two other Chromolaena species, *C. bigelovii (*TX only*)* and *C. odorata,* occuring only in southern Texas and Florida.

Also known as Ivy Leaf-false Thoroughwort, *C. ivifolia,* is an erect perennial shrub which can reach anywhere from three to five feet. It prefers full to part sun, and can handle dry to medium moist soils. In wild settings, it is found in open woods, edges of fields, fencerows, roadsides and other disturbed areas. Its puffs of disc florets range from pinkish to bluish purple and appear at the end of the stems that have short, stiff hairs. Ivyleaf Thoroughwort is somewhat weedy and is more appropriate in naturalistic gardens rather than in formal ones. Several sources indicate that birds feed on its seeds, so I will pay closer attention to the seed heads this winter!

The formal botanical classification of Ivyleaf Thoroughwort (*Chromolaena ivifolia* L.) is:

Family: Asteraceae
Genus *Chromolaena*
Species *ivifolia* Author L. (Linnaeus)

OLD-GROWTH FORESTS: WHAT THEY ARE AND WHY THEY MATTER

By Jacalyn Duncan and John Michael Kelley

Old-growth continues to diminish as more and more trees are being cut down to provide for development, farming and other uses. First, let's talk about what is an "old-growth" forest. According to onetreeplanted.org, it is a forest that has developed over a long period of time, largely free from catastrophic disturbances and that contains large, old trees of long-lived species that have grown past the traditional age of harvest. Importantly, a forest does not have to be ancient to be considered old-growth, as different tree species have vastly different life spans. For example, baldcypress can live as long as 2,000 years, while cottonwoods may only live 150 years. From the perspective of researchers, the important thing is that they are forests that have been largely undisturbed by humans and have abundant features of old age.

Second, what makes old-growth forests so important. Because old-growth forests have been largely undisturbed, they provide an ecological setting in which populations of plants and animals have evolved to a point of stability and exist in balance with each other and their environment. Due to their age and complexity, they can support a stunning diversity of life, absorb stormwater and release it sparkling clean, and host intricate mycelial networks that relay messages between individuals underneath the soil surface. Orchids such as the three-birds orchid and Kentucky lady-slipper are almost entirely restricted to undisturbed old stands in Louisiana.

Some of the benefits provided by old-growth forests that make them important include (from onetreeplanted.org):

1. Old-growth trees store massive amounts of carbon.
2. They shelter and protect sensitive species.
3. They are unparalleled in providing clean drinking water
4. They provide recreational benefits to local communities.
5. They help improve air quality.
6. They are of incredible importance to indigenous communities.
7. They host a stunning diversity of life.

Louisiana's old-growth stands are rare and fragmented (most of the state's forests being younger, second-growth) and only a few thousand acres remain of the original millions. However, some notable old-growth

White oak in an old-growth stand on the Evangeline Unit in Kisatchie National Forest.

OLD-GROWTH FORESTS: WHAT THEY ARE AND WHY THEY MATTER

Cont.

stands can connect us to the past; huge baldcypress trees at Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge and Lake Dauterive, the Historic Live Oak Grove in New Orleans' City Park, and the stunted longleaf of the Nature Conservancy's Persimmon Gully preserve.

Among the better non-profits concerned with old forests is The Old-growth Forest Network (John Michael Kelley is a coordinator). The Network dedicated several Louisiana forests during a one-week blitz including parts of Walter B Jacobs Memorial Nature Park, Barataria Preserve – Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, and Briarwood Nature Preserve. Plaquemine point is the only privately owned old-growth forest included in the Old-Growth Forest Network in Louisiana; the Comeaux's manage an old baldcypress stand here. They will also host a tour for LNPS and a speaker will describe their land at the next LNPS conference, March 2026. If you know of an old-growth forest in your area, consider nominating it for the Old-Growth Forest Network to protect and document these valuable ecosystems (John Michael Kelley can help with the description).

The Atchafalya National Heritage Area is promoting education and awareness of old-growth cypress in Louisiana wetlands and other habitats by sponsoring a program called "Louisiana Purchase and Bicentennial Cypress Legacies"; the Program is run by Mr. Harvey Stern. The purpose of the project is to inventory, landmark, and promote the stewardship of cypress trees over 200 years of age in Louisiana. These trees were alive at the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 as well as Louisiana's Statehood in 1812. Many old stands have been identified through this work, but most are only a few acres in size.

John Michael and I have had the opportunity to visit a privately owned tract of old-growth loblolly pine close to Urania Louisiana in LaSalle Parish, called the "Set Aside". It consists of 340 acres of 150+ year old loblolly pine forest. The area was acquired around 1899 by Urania Lumber Company containing virgin stands of longleaf, loblolly and shortleaf pine, as well as virgin hardwood in the stream and river bottoms. Henry Hardtner was one of the original principals of the Urania Lumber Company and played a role in the early protection of the area. Known for his early interest in sustainable forestry, he is often referred to as the "Father of Reforestation in the South". The Urania Lumber Company allowed professors and students from Yale University's Foresty School, one of the United States' earliest forestry schools, to conduct summer camp field studies within the "Set Aside". The "Set Aside" land was enrolled in the Living Legacy Lands, a component of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, designating the area as special and unique. It has been home to several champion trees in the past including the largest blackgum and loblolly.

Patchy canopy and gnarled forms of typical old-growth as seen at the Urania Set-Aside area.

Stunted post oak, bluejack oak, longleaf pine and shortleaf pine stands often go unnoticed as old-growth. Several stunted stands are scattered around Kisatchie National forest and on the Pleistocene terrace pastures of Caddo and Bossier parishes. The oaks in these stands may be only 16" or the longleaf 12" when they have exceeded 150 years in age. But high-statured stands are also overlooked; John Michael Kelley witnessed the cutting of

OLD-GROWTH FORESTS: WHAT THEY ARE AND WHY THEY MATTER

Cont.

120-200 year old white oaks and maples on a Wildlife Management Area in north Louisiana. Salvage cutting was the culprit, and as our hardwoods recover after the "great cut" they become more susceptible to windthrow, warranting the agencies to "salvage" their value. The results are hard to stomach.

The best way to save old forests is to foster love and appreciation for them. Several good talks on this have been held by LNPS and its affiliates. See the "Minding the Forest" podcast episode with John Michael Kelley to hear his philosophical take on the issue. The Coastal Plain Outdoors School is planning a class about recognizing old-growth at the (old-growth) State Arboretum at Chicot State Park. No known old-growth should be lost in this age; and, as much as we can manage, the recovered old-growth of the future should be preserved on our public lands. The Louisiana Wildlife Federation passed a resolution last year, which formally conveys the perspective held by many outdoorsmen: old-growth is precious. With proper protection, our great-grandchildren can still know its beauty.

A view of the Set-Aside area at Urania.

Old-growth shortleaf-oak stand in Soda Lake Wildlife Management Area.

Taking a Look at Native Bees

By Natalie Waters, Wildlife Conservation Coordinator, Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary Program

In a world full of endless to-do lists, it can be hard to find the time to slow down and enjoy the little things. Our gardens provide the perfect opportunity to pause and see which visitors we're attracting with our native plants. When you do, you'll likely spot at least one of the over 200 native bee species that call Louisiana home.

Which bee species might you see? What flowers can you plant to help keep them buzzing? When you begin to take a closer look at our native bees, you'll be captivated by their diversity.

The life of a bee varies from species to species. Unlike the familiar European honey bees, which nest in colonies, the vast majority of bees live solitary lives. A single female prepares her nest and gathers pollen for her offspring. 70% of bees nest in the ground, while the remaining 30% nest in cavities such as hollow stems, rock crevices, or dead wood. Solitary bees typically lay 20–30 eggs in their lifetime. Many have an annual life cycle, spending most of their lives in developmental stages such as larva, pupa, or dormant adult within their nests. They emerge from their nest in spring or summer, coinciding with the blooming of their preferred plants. The adult foraging stage typically lasts only 3–8 weeks.

One common bee you might find in your backyard is the two-spotted longhorn bee (*Melissodes bimaculatus*). They are about the size of a honey bee. Females have specialized white hairs on their hind legs called scopae, which appear yellow when covered in pollen. Males have very long antennae and a yellow colored clypeus on their face. The males often sleep in aggregations on grasses and sticks. Females nest in the ground, creating a main entry with several branching brood cells. She gathers pollen and nectar to form a "pollen loaf" in each brood cell, then lays an egg on top of it.

Two-spotted longhorn bee visiting lemon beebalm.

Native bees emerge from their nests at different times throughout the growing season, so be sure to plant native species that bloom in the spring, summer, and fall. Three excellent spring and early summer blooming plants that attract bees are: Gulf Coast penstemon (*Brazos penstemon*), Indian blanket flower (*Gaillardia pulchella*), and lemon beebalm (*Monarda citriodora*).

Two-spotted longhorn bee visiting

Some bees collect pollen to feed their young from a certain plant family, genus, or even a single species; they are known as specialist bees. The Broad-banded Longhorn bee (*Epimelissodes petulca*) and the Sandhills longhorn bee (*Epimelissodes aegis)* are specialist bees that collect pollen from the Asteraceae plant family, also known as the sunflower family. Both are solitary and nest in the ground. Bees in the genus *Epimelissodes* (formerly known as *Svastra*) are robust and hairy, with abdomens that are often banded. One way to tell these two species apart is by their eye color: the Broad-banded Longhorn bee has green eyes, while the Sandhills Longhorn bee has blue eyes. If you want to attract these bees, plant Mexican hat, also known as upright prairie coneflower (*Ratibida columnifera).* In addition to attracting pollen specialists, the Mexican hat's burgundy petals and delicate leaves provide a striking contrast to the dominant yellow flowers found in many of our gardens.

Sandhills longhorn bee on Mexican Hat.

Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), a native milkweed and host plant for the monarch butterfly, is also a magnet for native bees. This plant provides bees and butterflies with

Taking a Look at Native Bees *cont.*

A bright blue sweat bee in the subgenus Paraugochloropsis drinking nectar from butterfly

a copious amount of nectar in order to spread its pollen via a sticky, specialized structure called a pollinium, which is a mass of pollen grains that stick together and cling to the pollinator to help ensure efficient pollination. Bees from an assortment of families, colors, shapes, and sizes visit butterfly weed, including sweat bees and leafcutter bees.

As their name suggests, leafcutter bees use their large mandibles to cut small pieces of leaves to line their brood cells. They use hollow stems to nest in, so be sure to leave 12-24 inches of stem stubble from the previous year's growth to give the bees a place to nest. If you pay close attention, you may spot a female leafcutter bee carrying a piece of leaf into a hollow stem! Leafcutter, mason, and resin bees are in the Megachilidae family, all of which carry pollen under their abdomen. They have a habit of raising their abdomen in the air as they collect pollen to prevent the pollen from being brushed off. It can be hard to identify this group down to a species level, many can only be identified under a microscope.

Megachile bee displaying its pollen covered abdomen.

Sweat bees vary in size, color, and nesting habits. Some of the smallest bees fall into this family (Halictidae), ranging from 3 to 10 mm. iNaturalist is a wonderful tool to help you identify bees down to family, genus, and sometimes species. It also provides valuable data to scientists around the world.

If you're looking for a flowering plant that attracts bees and small butterflies all spring and summer, look no further than bitter sneezeweed (*Helenium amarum*). It's a prolific bloomer, and it does well in a range of soil types. It spreads easily in the garden, but it can be managed if it starts to take over. Leafcutter bees especially love this plant, and it's fun to watch them land abruptly and begin circling clockwise or counterclockwise on the flower, raising their abdomen to the sky as they collect pollen, and then they are off again, gone in the blink of an eye.

A leafcutter bee (Megachile policaris) on bitter sneezeweed.

It's more important than ever to garden with bees in mind. Our native bees are facing population declines, with nearly one in four species imperiled and at increasing risk of extinction. We depend on bees to pollinate our crops and sustain healthy ecosystems; the world would not be the same without them. Habitat loss and pesticide use are the main contributors to their decline. But there is good news, and the good news is you! Gardeners! You have the power to make a positive impact in your gardens for bees. You already know the importance of planting native plants. The next thing to do is to provide continuous blooms throughout the seasons. Are you interested in learning about what to plant to help our specialist bees? Visit the following website to learn more: https://jarrodfowler.com/specialist_bees.html. Be sure to eliminate or minimize your pesticide use. Take the time to watch the bees in your yard, try photographing them and uploading your findings to iNaturalist. You can provide nesting habitat for native bees by providing some bare ground, growing plants with pithy or hollow stems such as Joe Pye weed (*Eutrochium* spp.), and "planting" a log. If you want to learn more about native bees, I suggest reading *The Bees in Your Backyard* by Joseph S. Wilson and Olivia Messinger Carril.

So be sure to grab a cup of coffee or tea tomorrow morning and venture into your garden to look for native bees! Let it be a reminder that you're making a positive impact on this world, one flower at a time.

Louisiana Native Professional Certification Program: The First Class

By Wendy Rihner

Serving as a test subject for a medical study or being a guinea pig for some new product never really interested me. But sitting in a new class designed by the Louisiana Native Plant Society (LNPS)? Sign me up! The Louisiana Native Professional Certification Program (LNPCP) is a new LNPS initiative made possible by grants from the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program and the Louisiana Nursery and Landscape Association Foundation for Scholarship and Research.

This past June, 35 students - landscapers, scientists, garden managers, growers, nursery personnel - gathered at the National Wetland Research Center in Lafayette for a two-day, "basic level" class prepping professionals to meet the increasing demand for native landscaping. The weekend class, conceived by Dona Weifenbach and Tammany Baumgarten, with instructors Phyllis Baudoin Griffard, Baumgarten, Bill Fontenot, and Lawrence Rozas was a success! A list of recently certified professionals can be viewed in the new online directory on the LNPS website.

The design of the course was clearly laid out: two days of lectures and presentations with an exam on the afternoon of the concluding day. Students who earned a 70% or higher passed the written exam portion of the course. After completion of the test, each student was sent home with a landscape design scenario requested by a "client" complete with a "blueprint" of the home and yard. We were given the ecoregions in which our "clients" lived, and our designs were evaluated on our fidelity to the ecoregion (soils, terrain, etc.), the appropriateness of the plant species selected, and the design's compliance with our clients' requests. The take-home design portion of the class was worth 30% of our "grade."

The LNPCP training manual we used for the course is accessible and well-organized. It covers a range of topics from Louisiana's ecoregions to site preparation to plant nomenclature. To focus learning, the training manual provides a select list of natives - trees, shrubs, grasses and forbs - for students to study. And because this is a horticulture licensing class, several chapters are devoted to horticulture classifications, terminology, etc. The manual reflects a great deal of work done by Dona Weifenbach, William Fontenot, Lawrence Rozas, Tammany Baumgarten, Jo-Elle Burgard, Phyllis Baudoin Griffard, Brian White, Anandi A. Premlall, and others.

As a former college professor, I found the class instruction effectively structured; subject matter on PowerPoint presentations was followed by hands-on exercises. For example, in the classroom, we viewed slides of native species and invasive non-natives. After that, we broke into groups, walked the Center's grounds, touring a prairie garden, a wetlands garden, and a border-type garden, giving us the opportunity to get close to the plants. Lectures often don't "stick" if

Louisiana Native Professional Certification Program: The First Class *cont.*

students do not learn to apply what the lecture entails. We did not have to worry about that! Bill Fontenot and Tammany Baumgarten gave thorough presentations on landscape design, site prep and maintenance; subsequently, working with our "table mates", we had to design our own landscapes, applying the principles discussed and selecting the appropriate plants.

In speaking with other students, I think it is safe to say that for many of us, the on-site visits were the best part of the class. Rozas and Fontenot invited the class to their yards where we could further study plants included in the manual. The yard tours took site prep, design and plant selection from theory to practice. And as an added bonus, students were gifted with a copy of the 3rd edition of Bill Fontenot's book *Native Gardening in the South*.

Regarding logistical matters, the hotel where many of us stayed was a 5-minute walk from the Research Center. In addition, a hearty lunch was provided on-site both days.

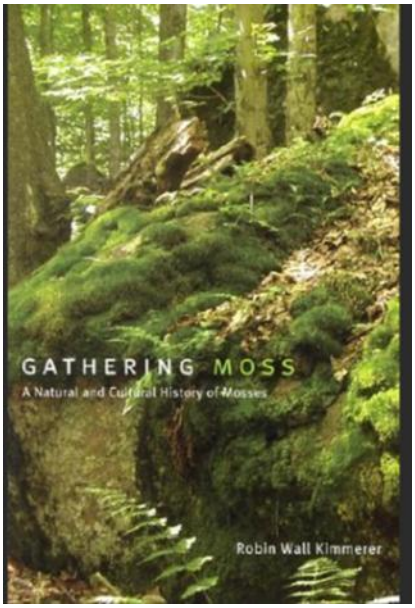
I thoroughly enjoyed the course and learned a great deal about design and site prep. In fact, I returned home and immediately reevaluated my yard! Of course, meeting new people from across Louisiana who care about native plants and our landscapes is always uplifting and heartening. And while I cannot speak for all, I think most of us found those two days were well-spent.

Earth Day at Alexandria Zoo

April 26, 2025 Alexandria Zoo's Earth Day Celebration was visited by 1,536 people. Annette Word and Jackie Duncan manned the LNPS table and were busy talking with folks about the LCH program, LNPCP program, giving away seeds, giving away Elliott's lovegrass plugs, and just talking about plants. There was also a signup sheet for those interested in establishing a local group, and 11 folks signed up. The event was held from 9am till 3pm and the visitors never stopped coming.

Book Review

By Janie Braud



Gathering Moss, A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses
by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2003)

From the South – our thoughts of gathering mosses, we automatically reference the early tradition of collecting Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) used for stuffing mattresses. However, Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Gathering Moss* is about bryophytes, which likely do not get much attention from our Louisiana native plant audience. Which is exactly why I wanted to point out what a great read this is! Although mosses are simplistic in structure, you will enjoy venturing into their microecosystem, which is intertwined with the complexities of a greater ecosystem. Robin Wall Kimmerer explains the biology of these interesting, non-vascular plants, her personal discoveries, and shares her indigenous wisdom. Yes, this book is focused on mosses, which are NOT usually lush in Louisiana, but the story of life, significance for humans, and Kimmerer's scientific methodology and passion for protection are universal. Get out your hand-lens and go find that interesting clump of green – you just might find several DIFFERENT species of mosses AND leafy liverworts (a spray of water is suggested to perk them up)! Many are familiar with Kimmerer's more recent best-seller, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, which I also enjoyed --- but don't overlook her earlier book, *Gathering Moss*. I look forward to reading her latest book, *The Serviceberry*.

Mamou (*Erythrina herbaceacea* L.)

By Jacalyn Duncan

Mamou — There is a small town in Louisiana named Mamou along with this plant. Are they related? No one knows for sure. Some think the name Mamou originated in the Acadiana area and named after Prairie Mamou, which was about 40 miles long and five miles wide, and was used as a great "vacherie"(cattle range) owned by Mr. Fontenot (Reese and Allen, p.4). In *Flowers Native to the Deep South* Caroline Dormon stated, "Plant of many names, in French country it is called "Mamou," because of the tremendous root." Some believe the word comes from the Mammoth fossils found in South Louisiana. If you have ever dug a Mamou, which I have, you know that the root is very large. I was born and raised in Texas and had never heard the name "mamou" until I moved to Louisiana. I called this plant coralbean, as many others do. But in Louisiana, it is called "Mamou" and pronounced MA MOO. I mispronounced Mamou once and was promptly corrected. According to Reese and Allen, the name "mamou" for this plant has been little used outside of Acadiana.

The formal botanical classification of Mamou (*Erythrina herbacea* L.) is:

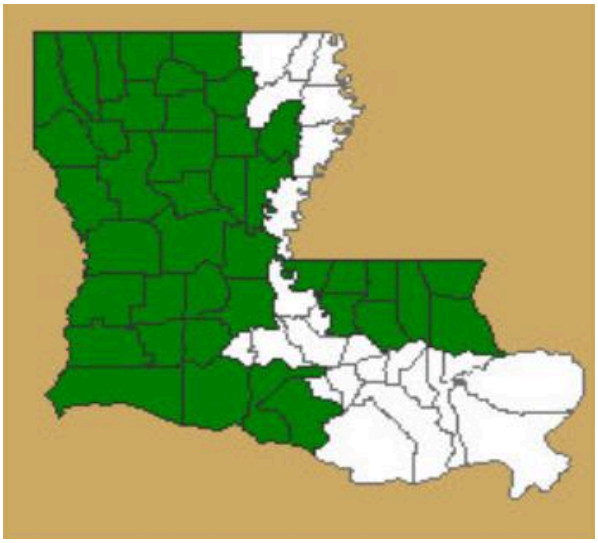
Family: Fabaceae (Pea Family)
Subfamily Papilionoidae
Genus *Erythrina*
Species *herbaceae* Author L. (Linnaeus)

E. herbacea is a perennial herb from a woody root producing stems 4 to 6 feet tall, the upper 20 inches thick with beautiful scarlet papilionaceous flowers.

Note: Papilionaceous means butterfly-like, as the irregular corolla of a pea, with a banner petal, two wing petals, and two fused keel petals.

The leaves are trifoliate compound with halberd-shaped leaflets that fold upwards in the midday sun. Green recurved prickles can usually be found on the leaves, leaflets, flowering stalk as well as the vegetative branches. The prickles of the Mamou lack a vascular strand and thus botanically should not be called spines or thorns.

Mamou grows in the sandy woods and prairie remnants of the coastal plain. Mamou is usually absent from alluvial floodplain soils as depicted on the following range map for Louisiana. In temperate zones, Mamou will freeze back in the winter and regrow the next spring. In more tropical climates Mamou will grow into a small tree or shrub.



Mamou (*Erythrina herbaceacea* L.) *cont.*

By Jacalyn Duncan

The branches of *E. herbacea* arise from the caudex each spring A caudex is a subterranean root/stem that is comprised of a "crown" at the surface of the soil where the above-ground branches arise annually, a short erect-like true stem below the crown, and a swollen tapering root that may divide into two or more stout branches below (Reese and Allen).

The word *Erythrina* originates from Greek and means redness, which is the color this plant embues in its flowers and seeds. The seeds are poisonous as are the leaves and root. The bright red seeds are very ornamental in the Fall, and they have been known to be used in beaded necklaces. Seeds were also used in early Mexican games, somewhat like dice, known as "patol". It is thought that Northern Cardinals and Northern Mockingbirds eat the seeds and provide a means of dispersal. Ants are possibly another means of dispersal. The seed is hard as a pebble and is best scarified for germination to occur. If seeds are removed from the pod before it opens, the seeds will germinate fresh.

E. herbacea seeds contain the alkaloid erythroidine, a powerful paralyzant of the motor system, erythroresin, an emetic, coralin, and erythric acid. Sources have noted that the seeds have been used to poison rats and dogs in Mexico, used as fish poison, and employed as a hypnotic agent (intoxicant). Caroline Dormon noted, In the sand hills, Mamou is known as "flea-weed," because it is claimed the dried root will drive away fleas.

The use of the mamou plant in Acadiana folk medicine seems to have a long history. The folk medicine in Acadiana concocted from the mamou plant was used to treat asthma, bronchitis, chest congestion, colds, congestion of the lungs, coughs, influenza, pleurisy, pneumonia, "la grippe", and "la croup." One recipe from Abbeville to treat pleurisy was to make a tea by taking roots from the outer edge of the plant. Wash, chop and then boil in water. Strain the tea and add sugar. Another recipe from Lafayette was to make a tea by boiling 3 seeds of mamou in water. Used to treat cough. (Reese and Allen, p 14-16.)

THIS PLANT IS TOXIC. DO NOT INGEST.

Dormon, Caroline. (1999). *Flowers Native to the Deep South*. Claitor's Publishing Division, Baton Rouge, LA.

Reese, William Dean assisted by Charles M. Allen. (2004). *MAMOU Acadian Folklore, Natural History, and Botany of the Mamou Plant, Erythrina herbacea L. (Fabacea)*. Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Lafayette, LA.

2026 LNPS Conference, March 6-8

Acadiana Baptist Center

Acadiana Baptist Center is in the small village of Richard, 37 miles northwest of Lafayette and 15 minutes southeast of Eunice (home of Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society prairie restoration site). Lodges, dormitories, RV spaces, tent camping and cabins will be available to rent.

On the 93-acre compound, many trails afford views of the abundant native plants.

Mark your calendar for March 6-8, 2026 for the next LNPS Conference at the Acadiana Baptist Center.

LNPS NOTICES

1. If you are interested in the **Louisiana Certified Habitat Program,** please email louisianacertifiedhabitat@gmail.com for more information and to receive the application.
2. Report wildflower locations along roadsides by clicking this link La DOTD - Louisiana Roadside Wildflower Locations to DOTD for input into the Wild flower Program.

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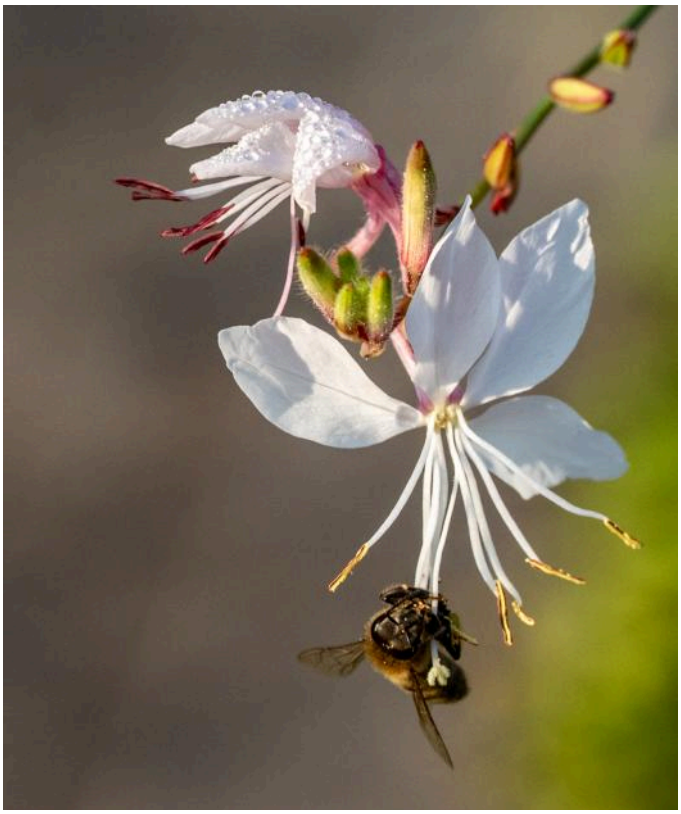
The deadline for newsletter articles, etc. is November 15 for the next LNPS newsletter. Any article involving native plants is welcomed.

Lindheimer's butterfly-weed (*Oenothera lindheimeri*)



Coral honeyseuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*)

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