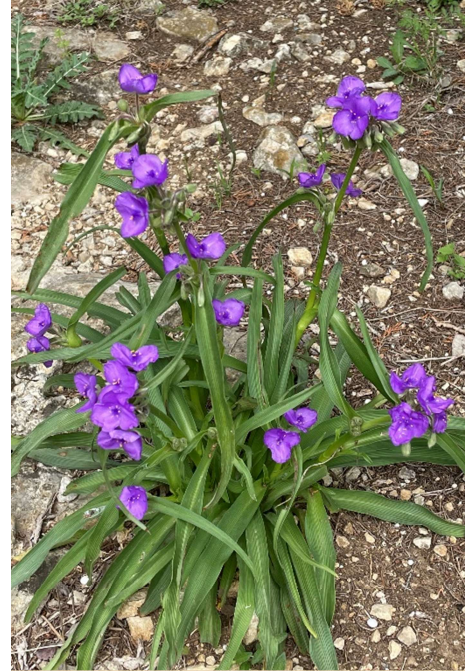


WHAT'S HAPPENIN' ON THE HILL
NATURAL HISTORY OF HAYS COUNTY
Beacon Hill, Buda, Texas
April 2021

A LIFE-GIVING RAIN

Spring is typically a season of abundance, when steady rains allow for plants to sprout and grow. So as the meltwater of winter's deep snows and thick ice faded away, plants were not ready for the drought that had crept in on Beacon Hill. New sprouts of growth became stressed and wilted, until, at last, in late March a life-giving rain soaked the ground. These plants benefitted mightily as the water fell to earth.

PRAIRIE SPIDERWORT, *Tradescantia occidentalis*, is a perennial herb found primarily from Texas through the Great Plains into Canada. The long linear leaves appear during winter and as they develop some people believe their arching habit appears spider-like on the ground. The beautiful 3 petaled flowers, especially attractive to bees, appear in clusters on stems 1-2' tall, in colors of pink, purple and infrequently white. The drought tolerant plant prefers sun or part shade. There are perhaps 3 dozen species in North America with 2/3 of those found in Texas, of which several are known to Hays County. Some of these species were used for food and medicine by various American Indian tribes, as the young leaves and stems are edible. The genus name honored John Tradescant, gardener for King Charles I of England, who received seeds from the Virginia Colony in the 1600's. The species name suggests its western range and lends another common name, Western Spiderwort.



Prairie Spiderwort - member of the Spiderwort family (Commelinaceae).

RUSTY BLACKHAW VIBURNUM, *Viburnum rufidulum*, is a large shrub or small tree, one of 150 Viburnums in the world, and is desirable for its four seasons of interest. Found from the Texas Hill Country east to Florida and north to Illinois, it is especially showy in the early spring when 4" clusters of white flowers attract bees & butterflies. The dark, glossy leaves are arranged oppositely along the arrow-straight stems that, by mid-April, also support developing fruits. The colorful autumn foliar display is followed by winter's dangling of edible blue-black fruit. The genus was first described in the 1700's by Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus, the Father of Taxonomy. American Indians ate the fruit and made arrow shafts from the stems. In 1991 archaeologists found 5,000-year-old Viburnum arrows in a quiver belonging to "Otzi" the Iceman, a Copper Age European man exposed by a melting glacier in the Alps.



Rusty Blackhaw is a member of the Honeysuckle family (Caprifoliaceae).

By Eric Beckers, Natural Heritage Committee
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