

WHAT'S HAPPENIN' ON THE HILL
NATURAL HISTORY OF HAYS COUNTY
Beacon Hill, Texas
April 2022

FRUITS AND VEGGIES

The green up we see today on the hill must have been equally welcomed by American Indians and early pioneers alike. After the sparse winter months with a limited diet, new growth on the land brought new promise. In this area, the Tonkawa people must have been pleased by the fresh abundance beginning to grow across the springtime landscape. Plants like these were high on the grocery list and eagerly consumed.

SOUTHERN DEWBERRY, *Rubus trivialis*, is a trailing or low arching perennial vine that is commonly found in our area. It grows in open habitats and can be encountered from the Rio Grande through the Hill Country and across the Southeastern US. The small white flowers are showy when viewed across the whole berry patch, and thick patches also create ideal wildlife habitat because of the prickly stems that can impede a would-be predator. The tasty black fruit will begin ripening later this month when berry hunters will be out filling their buckets with what they don't eat directly off the vine. American Indians sought out this early season fruit and ate it fresh. They also dried the berries and mixed them with dried meat and rendered fat to create the original trail mix called pemmican which would keep well for lengthy periods of time. Nutritious pemmican was carried on long trips such as hunting parties and used as a food source during the leaner times of the year. Venison, rabbit and turkey were often mixed with the seasonal fruits, nuts and acorns.



Dewberry is a member of the Rose family (Rosaceae)

DRUMMOND'S ONION, *Allium drummondii*, is a perennial herb found across much of the southern Great Plains from South Dakota down through Texas and into NE Mexico. Growing from a bulb, the short plant produces narrow leaves and a stem topped by a cluster of flowers brightly colored white, pink or lavender. The tasty plant was used by natives and pioneers and was often found in great numbers. Several species of *Alliums* are found in our area and they all emit the characteristic onion smell which helps differentiate them from similar looking but non-edible plants. Two creeks in our area, Onion and Garlic, were named by pioneers in reference to these native plants. The species name honors Scottish naturalist Thomas Drummond (1790-1835) who arrived in Texas in 1833 and spent nearly two years traveling the state from Galveston to the Edwards Plateau collecting plants and birds, many unknown to science at the time.



aka Wild Garlic is a member of the Lily family (Liliaceae)

By Eric Beckers, Natural Heritage Committee
Hays County Historical Commission