

# WHAT'S HAPPENIN' ON THE HILL NATURAL HISTORY OF HAYS COUNTY

Beacon Hill, Buda, Texas  
November 2021

## THANKS FOR THAT

Our natural heritage has blessed us again this year and now is the season for giving thanks. Our gratitude runs deep for the little things, like sunshine on a chilly morning, abundant rain that brings late season blossoms, colorful birds singing in good cheer, and butterflies floating on gossamer wings. Soon we will gather with family and friends and, as winter approaches, we will welcome the first frost on the pumpkin.

**TEXAS LANTANA, *Lantana urticoides***, is a spreading perennial shrub that grows 2-6' tall and is found from the southwestern US to southern Mexico. This very durable, drought tolerant plant grows on most soil types and from prairies to open woodlands. The stems may be prickly and the coarsely toothed 1-3" leaves, arranged oppositely, emit a pungent aroma when crushed. The tiny yellow and orange flowers are arranged in small 1-3" bouquets out on the end of branches. These flowers bloom throughout more than half of the year and are especially appreciated during the hot and dry summer months. When conditions are right, like this year, the blooms are sought out by migrating populations of Monarch butterflies that also search for nectar sources like Mealy Blue Sage and Frostweed. If these Monarchs are to survive, they will need fir tree roosts in the central highlands of Mexico, larval food plants like milkweed, and nectar sources like lantana along their epic migratory route across North America.



Texas Lantana is a member of the Verbena family (Verbenaceae)

**BUFFALO GOURD, *Cucurbita foetidissima***, is a trailing perennial vine that can grow to 20' in length and is found from the Great Plains through the Southwest and into Mexico. It grows well in sunny locations like fields and fencerows, and its very large tuberous root lends it to being drought tolerant. The 6-12" grayish green leaves are rough and triangular shaped and have an unpleasant odor when crushed. The 2-4" trumpet-shaped flowers are yellowish-orange in color with male and female flowers found on the same plant. The 2-4" fruit is a round gourd that starts out green striped and then turns yellow and tan as it matures. American Indians utilized this plant for food, medicine and soap. All plant parts contain toxic glycosides and should be treated cautiously. This gourd is related to more familiar cultivated plants like squash, cucumber and pumpkin. The field pumpkin, originating in Mexico and Central America, has been grown by American Indians for over 7,000 years.



aka Stinking Gourd is a member of the Gourd family (Cucurbitaceae)

By Eric Beckers, Natural Heritage Committee  
Hays County Historical Commission