

Native Shrubs That Grow in Wet Shady Areas

A few weeks ago I wrote about our native evergreen shrubs. Today, I will discuss native deciduous shrubs that are usually, but not exclusively, found in shady, wet areas in canyons and along creeks.

False Indigo, or Amorpha (*Amorpha fruticosa*) is a medium-sized shrub with compound leaves with oval leaflets about one inch long. It puts up flower spikes in the spring that can be 2 - 4 inches long and vary from dark blue to purple, resembling a bottle brush with yellow stamens. Very small seed pods are formed in the summer.

Buckeyes: There are four species of native shrubs in Texas with common names of buckeye. Three closely-related species are the Texas buckeye or white buckeye (*Aesculus glabra* var. *arguta*) found from this area to NE Texas and beyond, the Yellow buckeye (*Aesculus pavia* var. *flavescens*) the most common one in Kerr County, and the Red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia* var. *pavia*) found predominately east of here. Mexican buckeye (*Ungnadia speciosa*), not related to the others, is common throughout a large part of central and west Texas.

The three *Aesculus* species have palmately compound leaves (having 5, sometimes 7 - 9 or more) leaflets radiating from a central stem tip like fingers on a hand), and all three produce seeds in a semi-triangular, three compartment seed pod. The three species are most easily distinguished by the color of their flowers. All three species are very poisonous if ingested. Mexican buckeye is in a different genus and is distinguished by having pinnately compound leaves (leaflets arranged in pairs along a leaf stem) and showy pink blossoms in early spring. It has a seed pod similar to yellow and red buckeyes. The seeds of this species are also poisonous if ingested.

Carolina buckthorn (*Frangula caroliniana* or *Rhamnus caroliniana*) is a large shrub or small tree with 2-4 inch long, very shiny green leaves with prominent veins. It produces very small inconspicuous flowers in the spring and red to black 3/8 inch berries. It is usually seen growing where it is protected from the deer.

Creek plum (*Prunus rivularis*) is a small shrub (to 6 feet) prone to thicket-forming shoots. It is inconspicuous except in early spring when it is covered with cream-colored fragrant flowers. Its fruit is usually less than 3/4 inch in diameter. There are several other plum species native to different parts of Texas.

Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) is found almost exclusively adjacent to or actually in creeks. It has 2 – 6 inch leaves that are usually partially folded along the center and arranged along the stems in pairs opposite each other. Its striking summer fragrant flowers look like 1 inch round pincushions or, if you are a certain age, Sputniks, which turn into rough brown balls. Not, apparently a favorite deer food.

American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) is a 3 - 10 foot tall shrub with 2-6 inch egg-shaped pointed leaves in an opposite arrangement along the stem. They have white or pink flower clusters along the stem that form an eye-catching bright purple ring of berries around the stem. They grow naturally at least as far west as Kendall Co.

Wafer ash or Hop tree (*Ptelea trifoliata*) is a medium-sized shrub in the citrus family. It has trifoliolate compound leaves (leaves in clusters of three). It has inconspicuous sweet-smelling flowers which eventually form flat wafer-shaped winged seeds. Legend has it that early settlers used the seeds in place of hops for making beer. Not a real deer favorite.

Common Spice-bush (*Lindera benzoin*) is a rather unremarkable multi-trunked shrub which grows in moist areas from central Texas north and east to Maine and Michigan. It has small yellow flower clusters attached to the stems before the leaves come out. The fruit is very small berries. The leaves, when crushed, have a citrus aroma. Deer will nibble it.

It should be noted that almost nothing in Mother Nature is absolute. I have collected the shrubs discussed here as ones found along creeks and in cooler canyons simply as a unifying feature of these shrubs. But while it is common to find these shrubs in these areas, it should not be assumed that they cannot be found in drier, sunny areas, or that they cannot be grown in areas removed from water. And conversely, it doesn't mean that other species, not discussed here, will not sometimes be found along creeks in shady canyons.

Merry Christmas All. Until next time...

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