

It's Great to Be in the Hill Country on a Day Like This

It is March 14 and on our shady back porch it is 86 degrees! Last week we measured nearly 3 inches of rain over a four-day period. It doesn't get much better than this.

Spring is really coming to life now. Here are some examples.

I went out to photograph the golden groundsel and found it covered with butterflies and bees. As I walked around I found what appeared to me to be numerous species of bees including at least two species of bumblebees. Later I noticed bumblebees mating on Texas mountain laurel blooms.

We also noticed our first hummingbirds, and within minutes of putting out a hummingbird feeder they found it. We also had a visit from a couple of barn swallows. We had a pair build a nest under our porch and raise two broods last year—don't know if these are the same pair scouting for another nest site this year or not.

I also noticed a wren bringing nest material to a nest box. I understand that male wrens frequently build more than one nest to improve the odds of enticing a female.

In addition to the golden groundsel, we have all the salvias, penstemon cobeia, Texas mountain laurel, yellow columbine, coral honeysuckle, mealy blue sage and bluebonnets blooming. It looks like it will be a good year for bluebonnets. The Rosemary is still in bloom as well.

The plums and redbuds are mostly past their peak bloom now. The order of their blooming on our place was Mexican plum first, then creek plum, then Mexican redbud then Texas redbud. All of these bloom before they put out leaves. The rusty blackhaw viburnum put up shiny new leaves weeks ago and is now in full bloom.

Most of the possumhaws are well leafed out now and some are already showing buds, but some are still in the small-leaf stage.

It is always interesting to watch the progression of new green leaves coming out on the deciduous trees and shrubs. I can usually count on the blackjacks putting out new leaves as well as blooms before the post oaks, and the Spanish oaks are usually later still. This year, the black jack oak in our yard that usually puts new leaves out first is behind most of the other blackjacks, and at least one post oak that is usually much behind that blackjack is well ahead of it this year.

This is always a nervous time watching our semi-evergreen live oaks undergo leaf exchange. Unlike most deciduous trees, the live oaks don't lose leaves in the fall but keep them through the winter and then undergo leaf exchange in March and April. This time of year, you can frequently see a shower of leaves falling from a live oak with each gust of wind. It is the kind of thing that any other time of year would cause you to worry about oak wilt. For live oaks, new leaves begin to come out just as the old leaves are

still falling, and the trees form the catkins or male blooms (strings of greenish-yellow blooms) at about the same time as well.

The timing of all of this shows that trees are truly individuals and they do things differently at different times. Right now we have some live oaks that have lost most all of their leaves and others that have not even started to lose leaves yet. Likewise, not all post oaks or all blackjacks in the same area will lose leaves in the fall or grow new leaves in the spring at exactly the same time. We have two volunteer blackjack oaks that came up in our yard the same year about 6 feet apart (planted by the same squirrel?). They are about 5 or 6 years old now and over 6 feet tall. One always grows new leaves in the spring ahead of the other by a few weeks and loses leaves in the fall sooner also.

Growing up as a kid I remember hearing that you could safely plant a garden as soon as the mesquites began to leaf out because there would be no more freezes after that. I am surprised that our mesquites are beginning to leaf out this soon.

Lots to see in one beautiful day.

Until next time...

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