



# Gaillardia

## Oklahoma Native Plant Society

The purpose of the Oklahoma Native Plant Society is to encourage the study, protection, propagation, appreciation and use of Oklahoma's native plants.

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**COPY AND ART DEADLINE  
FOR NEXT ISSUE IS  
February 5th, 2017**

"Because they are primeval, because they outlive us, because they are fixed, trees seem to emanate a sense of permanence. And though rooted in earth, they seem to touch the sky. For these reasons it is natural to feel we might learn wisdom from them, to haunt about them with the idea that if we could only read their silent riddle rightly we should learn some secret vital to our own lives; or even. More specifically, some secret vital to our real, our lasting and spiritual experience.

*Kim Taplin, Tongues in Trees*

### Upcoming Events/Activities

(check the ONPS website for more details)

**December 5-6:30** NE Chapter, Tulsa Garden Center, Adam Sarmiento "Landscaping with Native Plants"

**January 5-6:30** Central Chapter, OSU-OKC Horticulture Center, 400 N Portland, Bruce Hoagland "Historical Perspective of OK Native Plants and the OU Biosurvey"

**January 22-2:00** Southwest Chapter, Cameron University Science Complex in Lawton. The speaker will be Elisabeth Murphy of Murphy Farms, "Sustainable Horticulture in a Dry Environment".

**February 4**-Indoor Outing, Tulsa Garden Center. 2435 S. Peoria, Tulsa, OK

Note: all members are invited to all meetings, including board meetings, and are encouraged to bring guests



Left: *Quercus marilandica* Blackjack Oak

Right: *Quercus muhlenbergii* Chinkapin Oak

Photo: Marilyn Stewart

**WELCOME TO THESE NEW MEMBERS**

- Claudia Barnes, Okeene
- Andrea Clark, Noble
- Scott Copelin, Yukon
- Alicia Coyle, Oklahoma City
- Lynda Endsley, Lawton
- Dustin & Richard Green, Norman
- Susan K. Hart
- Shelly Henke, Oklahoma City
- Donna Horton, Tulsa
- Brenda J. Johnston, Oklahoma City
- Matthew & Elinor Langston, Norman
- Kimberly Littrell, Sapulpa
- Kathryn Marino, Oklahoma City
- Cindy McIntyre, Lawton
- Laura Miller, Howe
- Carolyn Nave, Tulsa
- Brenda Nickels, Broken Arrow
- Alise Osis, Norman
- Sherry L. Oxford, Jones
- Susan Prescott,, Nichols Hills
- Wendy J & Chaz Simmons, Oklahoma City
- Jona & Jentry Squires, Kingfisher
- Angela Torres, Tishomingo
- Cara Cowan Watts, Claremore
- Alyssa Whiteman, Nichols Hills

**DONATIONS**

- Dale & Sue Amstutz
- In memory of Evelyn Washburn
- Harriet G. Barclay Fund

“I like trees because they seem more resigned to the way they have to live than other things do.”

*Willa Cather* O Pioneers

**President’s Paragraph**

Joe Roberts

There is something uplifting about bundling up against the cold and taking a walk in the winter woods. Sunlight shines through to the forest floor, exposing things not seen in the shade of summer, and the shape of the trees and their branches are revealed against the gray sky. A lone walker is almost sure to have the place to themselves to enjoy, along with the squirrels and birds that are now easy to see in the naked, upper branches. No ticks, no mosquitoes, no poison ivy. Sit with your back against some ancient giant, face the sun, and enjoy your sandwich surrounded by silence. And no flies!

This winter issue of the Gaillardia is dedicated to the trees. Providers of wood for our homes, paper for this newsletter, food for our families, shade from the Oklahoma sun. And, in addition to their numerous practical gifts, they provide us with a sense of wonder and spirit. How many poems and stories have you read about trees? One of my favorites is “The Giving Tree” by Shel Silverstein, but I’ll bet you have a favorite too. We hope you enjoy this issue, and hope you are able to take your walk in the winter woods soon.

As this year’s ONPS activities wind down, reflecting on 2016 brings a sense of optimism as to what can be accomplished in 2017. Our society has had some great, well-attended activities statewide, membership is up, and we’ve entered into some collaborative efforts with other like-minded groups that will continue for some time. After the holidays things start up again, so keep checking the website for upcoming events.

A very happy holiday season to all of you! ***“Go placidly amid the noise and haste...”***

**From the Editor**

The differences in our state’s soil composition, rainfall and temperatures are perhaps most apparent when observing our trees and forests. A tree flourishing in southeast Oklahoma may come to a quick end in the panhandle. The Caddo Maple growing in Red Rock Canyon would balk at the high rainfall and rich soil of McCurtain County. Trees, more than just about any other vegetation, give us a sense of place. The scrubby oaks, pinyons and junipers of western Oklahoma may not be grand in height, but their raw beauty can stop me in my tracks every time. The tall, straight pines and thick forests of the southeast tower over the landscape. Washington Irving described his journey through the cross-timbers as “like struggling through forests of cast iron.”

If you plant a tree, seek out one of our natives, they will feed wildlife of every kind and be a lasting gift to a future generation.

## Botanist's Corner

Mike Schnelle Phd, OSU

### *Taxodium distichum*

Bald cypress is an American conifer that “has it all”. Native to the Southeastern U.S. coastal plain including South-eastern Oklahoma, *T. distichum* not only yields multiple ornamental traits throughout the year but this member of the Taxodiaceae family has practical value for filling specific niches in the landscape. While commercially available, bald cypress remains often unknown by Oklahoma consumers.

Bald cypress has fern-like and thus very attractive foliage. Leaves of this Oklahoma native are only 2-” long. Perhaps the most exciting attribute of bald cypress is its genetic diversity regarding how the foliage looks. Some trees have much narrower leaf blades which has caused experts to fuss whether a distinctive and separate species exists that is sometimes called pond cypress or if in fact bald cypress is “all over the board” regarding its foliar appearance and overall growth habit.

Male and female flowers are of little aesthetic consequence when compared to a magnolia or other showy flower. Still, drooping flowers during cold weather do provide at least modest ornamental appeal. Furthermore, fall foliage color is copper to yellow for some trees and can be outstanding. But because *T. distichum* remains seed grown, fall color varies considerably including sometimes disappointing hues of brown. The feathery foliage drops by early November to reveal showy rugged branches. Reddish-brown bark provides winter interest as well as one inch brown fruits that also serve as a food source for local wildlife. The buttressed trunk (very thick trunk towards the soil line), upright architecture of the tree and above-ground roots (“knees”) that may be present also add visual excitement to the winter landscape. Knees will not interfere when trees are grown in the landscape as they will consistently be trimmed down by lawn mowers. However, when grown in or near water the knees are then allowed to express themselves and can result in very showy 2-3’ above- ground roots for year round visual excitement.

Use this Oklahoma-bred tree for lifelong shade. Bald cypress will easily grow (in cultivated landscapes) 30-45’ and nearly as wide over a 30 year or longer period. This species is truly an investment for future generations as it can effortlessly live for hundreds of years. This deciduous conifer has also been overlooked as a street tree. While it prefers acidic soils, I have personally seen it thrive in soils at 7.5 pH. Certainly the greater the pH, the greater the likelihood of chlorosis (yellowing) adversely affecting the tree’s appearance or even its health in severe cases. Bald cypress, contrary to popular belief, is actually quite resistant to short-term droughts. I’ve grown it a number of years with only minor leaf drop when relying solely on natural rainfall. Still, supplemental irrigation is ideal for lush foliage and overall appearance. It is equally at home growing in chronically wet soils. Although partial shade is okay, a full sun

setting is imperative for best growth and symmetry of this strong-wooded yet fast growing species. Bald cypress can be grown in zones 5-10. In summary, this Oklahoma gem that is found alongside the American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) is a superior species that consumers from both the United States and abroad continue to enjoy for its ease of maintenance and its reputation for being relatively disease and pest-free.

### Invasive Watch

Chad Cox

Invasive Plant Council

### *Broussonetia papyrifera*

Paper Mulberry

*Broussonetia papyrifera*, introduced from Asia as an ornamental tree, was extensively planted in Oklahoma in earlier years, so is found around old homestead areas in all six regions of the state according to OkIPC Watch List of invasive plants. They grow rapidly and can reach to 40 feet. They have a spreading canopy and make a good shade tree. The bark was used to make paper in China, hence the name, and the inner bark is made into clothing in other Asian countries.

Leaves are of varying size and arrangement, from simple ovate to deeply lobed, even asymmetrically, blades that are similar to those of other mulberries. The male flowers are in trailing white catkins and the female flowers on separate trees are in tight globes with extended white styles giving a wild hairy look to the globes. When the styles are shed, a green ball is left. When the fruit matures, the fertile female flowers become an extended orange, separate member of the fruit (see picture). The fruits are sweet and tasty so lead to many animals distributing the seeds.

In addition to the seed distribution, the new trees arise from extensive sprouting from the roots. Left alone, the tree will often become a grove of trees. The trees grow in poor soil and under poor conditions so are often planted in urban areas where other trees will not do well. That hardy ability, unfortunately, adds to their invasiveness.

Control of *B. papyrifera* is sketchy but herbicides containing triclopyr are effective with treatments of basal bark, cut-stem, hack-and-squirt, or injection methods. Resprouting from the roots is very likely so will require a follow up for two years. The sprouts, as well as saplings, can be killed with spraying the leaves with a triclopyr herbicide.

There are 145 tree species native to Oklahoma and 21 species of trees which are introduced and have naturalized.

## Oklahoma's Giant of the Prairie

### *Populus deltoides*

Mark Bays

Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator

Oklahoma Forestry Services

Oklahoma's 12 million acres of forestland is home to close to 145 native trees of various shapes, sizes uses and adaptability with some of them only occurring in a very small local setting. One tree stands out more than others not only because of its size but also because it is found in all of our forest types and is native in all 77 counties.

Eastern cottonwood; *Populus deltoides* is located throughout much of central and eastern Oklahoma and the plains cottonwood; (*P. deltoides* var. *occidentalis* Rydb.; *P. sargentii* Dode) can be found in the central and more western part of the state. This majestic tree can grow to be over 100 feet tall with an equal spreading of its branches and crown. The largest recorded in Oklahoma has a circumference of a little more than 26 feet making it over 8 feet in diameter. These champions of the prairie were often used as gathering places by early settlers because of their shade. They were also indicators of potential water sources for pioneers crossing the landscape because they tend to naturalize around waterways, streams, rivers and springs. They are one of the fastest growing trees in North America and can live to be over 100 years old. Cottonwood is in the same family as aspen trees and their triangle shaped leaves causes them to appear to shiver or tremble in the wind and during their fall color display of brilliant yellow this can be quite the spectacular show.

For several weeks in late spring the female tree releases thousands of seeds with a cottony covering that can be carried for miles in the wind. If your allergies are acting up while seeing this display you are not having a reaction to cottonwood as the pollen has long since passed.

Its sticky, resinous leaf buds collected in the spring can be made into oils and salves for topical treatment of minor scrapes and cuts, inflammation, bug bites, pain and soreness in muscles and joints. The bark and leaves can be made into a bitter tea for pain relief similar to the way you would use the willow tree in place of an aspirin. Other early uses were that of food for horses and livestock, dugout canoes, some structures and tool handles. Today their wood is sometimes used for boxes, crates, plywood, matches, and paper pulp. Cottonwood is a true native throughout Oklahoma and I cannot imagine traveling through the forests of Oklahoma and not seeing these gentle giants dot the landscape.

"A nation that destroys its soil destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people."

*Franklin Delano Roosevelt*

## My Second Favorite Oak

### *Quercus muhlenbergii*

Chinkapin Oak

Wayne Chambers

Horticulturist

We have a Chinkapin oak growing alongside our gravel driveway. It's about 25' tall and about 4"-5" in caliper. It has been tremendously undemanding since we planted it from a 5 gallon container some 15-20 years ago. It gets no special care- no chemical fertilizer-no extra water unless I'm watering some new plants nearby. The soil it's growing in is loose and loamy- but certainly not rich- and about half of it's root system is under the gravel driveway. We don't rake the leaves from beneath our trees so they all get good organic material.

Chinkapin oaks have wavy leaves with a lighter green underside. When the wind blows, the leaves flutter and they look really pretty. Their acorns are light green with whitish green caps. The acorns dry to a light tan, but I've never seen any ripen on our tree. I'm assuming the squirrels get them off the tree and the wild turkeys get them off the ground.

Fall color on most Chinkapin oaks is usually a soft yellow and doesn't seem to last very long. In winter, the trees have a nice, clean silhouette. The branches are light gray while the trunk is a somewhat darker gray, tending to be shaggy with age.

Most Chinkapin oaks I've seen in the wild tend to be in valleys or along the sides of valleys. They can get very large with age, so should be sited properly.

Having said all that- I've never been sure why people don't plant more of them. They're adaptable and dependable and available- if you go to the right grower. When buying one, try to get one from seed sourced from as near to the planting site as possible; provenance and all that, you know.

In case you're wondering, my favorite oak is Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*). That brings me to my next point, which is that Bur and Chinkapin are both in the white oak group and can hybridize if their flowering times overlap. We have three Chinka-Bur hybrids growing on our place. They are all planted on different soils and exposures and all are doing really well. We got all three a few years back from Sunshine Nursery in Clinton, OK.

On another note- I've seen *Quercus muehlenbergii* called Chinquapin oak, Chinkapin oak while the preferred spelling is Chinkapin when referring to oaks.

To sum up:

You should plant this tree because:

\*It is adaptable

\*It feeds lots of wildlife-from mammals to insects (and the animals that feed on the insects that feed on the oak-is this beginning to make sense now?)

\*It is pretty when young and stately when old

\*It will outlive you and three more generations-so take a step of faith and optimism and plant a Chinkapin oak.

## 2016 ONPS Annual Meeting at Medicine Park, OK.

Joe Roberts

The 2016 ONPS Annual Meeting was held October 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> in Medicine Park, OK, at the gates of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. The weather could not have been better, and over 50 people gathered for the weekend. Friday afternoon folks met to enjoy the new Medicine Park Museum and the hillside of native plants and flowers in their substantial gardens. Afterwards we all enjoyed a social hour and dinner at the Old Plantation Inn.

Saturday morning registration was followed by several different field trips within the refuge from which to choose, then back to the Environmental Education Center for lunch. We then enjoyed (thoroughly - she was funny!) a talk on maintaining the health of the mixed grass prairie, by D'Anna Laminack, environmental education specialist at the refuge. She spoke of the challenges of managing a refuge like the Wichita Mountains WR that is heavily visited and sometimes seems more like a National Park than a wildlife refuge. We then conducted our General Membership meeting and subsequent Board Meeting, and new ONPS officers and board members were elected for 2017. We finished up in time to dash back to Medicine Park for a banquet and to enjoy a talk by David Redhage, President of the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture near Poteau, OK. David brings a lot to the table, with a background in agriculture, ranching, economics, and environmental management. In a state like Oklahoma, with the importance of agriculture and 95% of the land held privately, this kind of multi-disciplinary expertise is what's needed to effectively promote native plant conservation. You can check out more about the Kerr Center at [www.kerrcenter.com](http://www.kerrcenter.com). The main event over, we adjourned for the evening, although small groups were spotted at a local establishment engaged in heated political and philosophical discussions till the wee hours. No damage was reported.

Sunday morning was again beautiful, and we were treated to a hike to The Narrows, a steep-sided canyon on the refuge with a unique environment. Our guide Helen Riley of the SW Chapter did her best to keep us moving in a straight line for the first 300 meters, before botanical fever overcame the party and she had to surrender. From then on it was a classic ONPS field trip. A bit like herding cats, with little detached groups wandering every which direction, all bent over to examine and discuss their own plant finds, oblivious to the movement of the others. It's a wonder we didn't have to send out a search party... Man, did we have fun!

The largest tree (based on total points) listed for Oklahoma in the 2014 Registry of Champion Trees is a Bald Cypress with a circumference of 292 inches, height of 128 feet and crown spread of 77 feet. It is located in McCurtain County at the Little River Wildlife Refuge.

## Tree Reference Guides

One of the best—and most beloved—tree identification books is Forest Trees of Oklahoma, a publication of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture and Forestry originally published in 1927 and now in its 12<sup>th</sup> edition. There are many reasons for its popularity; the leaves and twigs of 156 species are clearly and simply drawn, maps show where in the state the tree naturally occurs, it offers helpful tips for identification, it's a perfect size for the glove compartment or backpack, **and** it is inexpensive. As an added bonus it includes a registry of Oklahoma's champion trees. **Only \$3.00** from the OKDofAF located at 2800 N Lincoln Blvd in OKC and also available from ONPS.

There are many tree identification sources, the following have been recommended by ONPS members:

Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Trees by the National Audubon Society

Know It and Grow It by Carl Whitcomb

Manual of Woody Landscape Plants by Michael Dirr

Shrubs and Woody Vines of Missouri by Don Kurz

The Sibley Guide to Trees by David Sibley

Tree Finder: A Manual for Identification of Trees by Their Leaves by May Theilgaard Watts

Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines: A Pictorial Guide by Russell Stevens and Chuck Coffey, Noble Foundation

Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of the Southwest by Robert Vines.

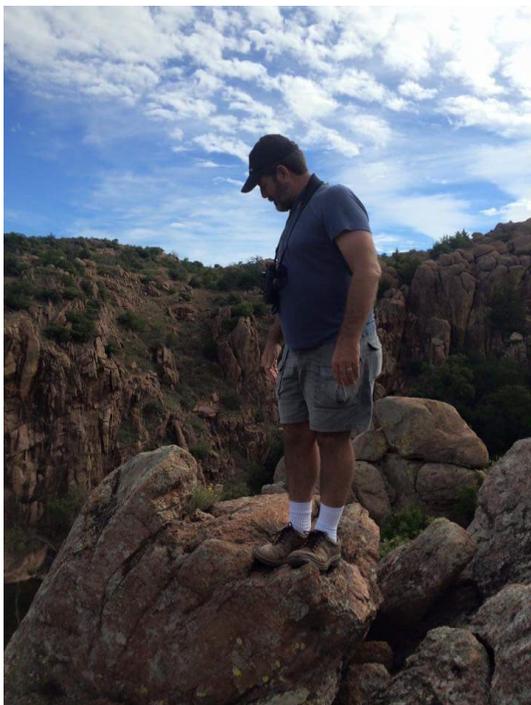
Trees of North America by Frank Brockman

What Tree is That? by The Arbor Day Foundation

<http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/technology/pdfs/fieldguide.pdf>

[http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/silvics\\_manual/table\\_of\\_contents.shtm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/silvics_manual/table_of_contents.shtm)

The tree with the largest circumference (when measured 4.5 feet from the ground) is a Cottonwood located in Woodward County and measures 309 inches. It is 95 feet tall and has a crown spread of 99 feet.



Joe Roberts playing King of the Mountain

Photo: Adam Sarimento



Dinner at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge

Photo: Dale Amstutz

# Annual Meeting at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge



Tree walk near the Environmental Education Center led by Mike Dunn

Photo: Jeannie Coley



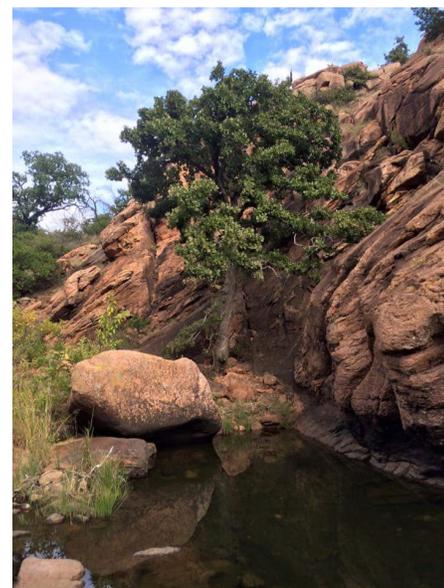
*Chrysopsis sp.*

Photo: Adam Sarimento



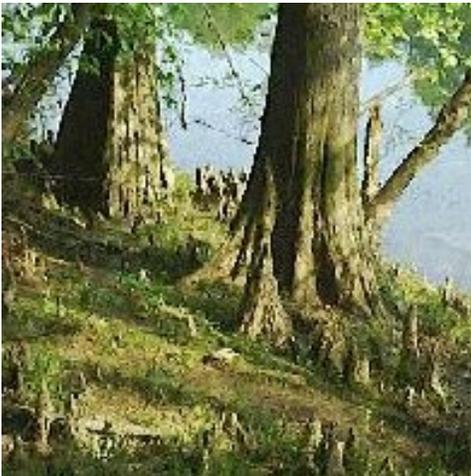
*Eryngium leavenworthii*

Photo: Kim Jones Isaac



*Quercus stellata*

Photo: Adam Sarimento



*Taxodium distichum*

Bald Cypress

Photo: OU Biosurvey

*Broussonetia papyrifera*

Paper Mulberry

Photo: USDA



*Populus deltoides*

Cottonwood

Photo: OU Biosurvey



*Juniperus virginiana*

Eastern Red Cedar

Photo: OU Biosurvey



*Juglans microcarpa*

Little Walnut

Photo: C.R. Ledford



*Sassafras albinum*

Photo: Marilyn Stewart

***Quercus marilandica***

Blackjack Oak  
Dave Seat

While our official state tree is the Redbud, perhaps no tree epitomizes Oklahoma more than the Blackjack oak, *Quercus marilandica*. Like the people of The Sooner State, the “Blackjack” is tough, sturdy and adaptable to the harshest of conditions.

Found nearly statewide, Blackjack oaks – along with Post oaks – are the dominant trees of the Cross Timbers forest. This ancient woodland cuts through the heart of Oklahoma where it separates the vast Southern plains from the lush Southeastern forests. When author Washington Irving encountered the Cross Timbers and its throngs of Blackjacks in 1835, he described it as a “forest of cast iron”. It’s easy to see why when you examine the trunk of this oak with its deep ruts and iron-like outer skin. The common name “Blackjack” comes from the nearly black color of the tree’s thick bark, which protects it from all sorts of would-be dangers, including fire.

While typically growing 10 to 20 feet tall, if given proper space, Blackjacks can soar to heights of 50 feet or higher. These oaks are of immeasurable value to native wildlife like song birds, turkeys, deer and squirrels, and are a vital part of our state’s natural environment and heritage.

***Juglans microcarpa***

Little Walnut  
C.R. Ledford

When attending the annual meeting at the Wichita Mountains Refuge I thought of Little Walnut. It is scattered in seventeen western counties in Oklahoma. The fruit is the smallest of the walnuts being half-inch to three-quarter in diameter. The seed is tasty and nutritious, but one may burn more calories extracting the meat than what is gained by eating.

It grows as a large multi-trunked shrub or small, clumped spreading, low-branched tree that can reach over thirty-feet in height. Its habitat includes rocky stream bottoms, canyons, and terraces of dry river beds; adapted to sites with limited moisture. Uses of the wood are similar to black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) on a smaller scale, but scarcity of the tree is a limitation. The fruit is utilized by small mammals and the tree provides habitat for birds. It has been used in shelter-belt plantings. Its range includes Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Texas and portions of northern Mexico. Ethnobotanical citations specifically for the tree are uncommon unlike that of black walnut. It has been reported; that the faction of Kickapoo people that continue to live in northern Mexico utilized the plant to make axe handles, bowls, bows, deer calls, and pipe stems.

***Juniperus virginiana***

Pros and Cons of Eastern Redcedar

Jacob H. Dyer  
OSU Ecologist

Lest we forget, eastern redcedar (ERC) is a native tree species to Oklahoma. In fact, it is one of the most widespread native tree in Oklahoma, occurring naturally in all counties east of the 100<sup>th</sup> parallel. ERC natively occurs on rocky outcrops, steep ravines, rocky glades, and other habitats that fire was inhibited. ERC is classified as a fire-sensitive species and would likely have been naturally controlled in Oklahoma’s many fire-dependent ecosystems. ERC is extremely drought hardy and extremely long-lived. On a purely physiological basis, ERC can sustain water stress at least twice as extreme as post oak and blackjack oak! In Oklahoma, the oldest tree officially recorded is ERC in the Cross Timbers of Oklahoma - over 500 years old! ERC has been, and still is, valued for its economic services. For example, ERC provides very aromatic and strong wood that has been harvested for myriad purposes included cabinetry, fence posts, and even wine barrels. It was also extensively planted as a drought hardy shelterbelt tree, as living snow fences, and livestock/wildlife protection, especially in the Great Plains of Oklahoma.

Let us also not forget that, despite ERC being a native plant, it has encroached native and managed ecosystems well beyond its native habitats. After decades of overgrazing, fire suppression, and widespread planting for historical conservation purposes (see above), ERC has increased dramatically in abundance. According to research from OSU, ERC encroachment is estimated to be roughly 750 acres per day, and can be found on more than 8 million acres statewide! As a consequence of encroachment, many ecosystems have profoundly altered function – alterations in water and carbon cycling, forage production, and competition with other native species. For example, an individual ERC tree can use over 6 gallons of water a day annually and will continue to use water for growth even during the dormant season of other native plants, potentially altering run-off and storage of water resources regionally.

Despite the recent press of ERC being decried as one of the worst ‘invasive’ plant species in Oklahoma, ERC is a native species that is an important component of our landscape.

The fall webworm, *Hyphantria cunea*, certainly made itself known this year in Oklahoma on many of our trees—especially fruit and nut trees. Persimmons were completely covered with webs and stripped of leaves. This is a native species of moth and while the webs are unsightly they are rarely a threat to a healthy tree. Some years are worse than others for this small white moth and the larvae you see in the fall is the second generation. Control isn’t necessary although sometimes an annoyed homeowner may poke a hole in the nest so the caterpillars will fall out and predators will have easy access. The insecticide *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) is not recommended as it will also kill any other nearby caterpillars.

## Paula Shryock Receives Betty Kemm Service Award

Recipient of the 2016 Betty Kemm Service Award is Paula Shryock of Stillwater. Paula's service to ONPS include State Secretary from 2007-2010, member of the editorial staff of the Native Plant Record since 2008 and Production Editor of that publication since 2009, and ONPS liaison to the OSU Library where ONPS Archives are housed. Cited for her attention to detail both as Secretary during her term of office, and more recently as proofreader for the ONPS journal, Paula is credited by other members of the journal's editorial staff with assuring that the ONPS scientific journal is one that the Society can be proud of. The traditional gailardia embossed glass plaque was presented to a very surprised Paula by Sue Amstutz, Chairman of the ONPS Awards Committee, at the Annual Meeting of the Society on October 8, 2016.



"If a tree falls in the forest and nobody is there to hear it, doesn't it just lie there and rot?"

*Chuck Palahniuk*

## *Cercis canadensis*

Redbud

Adam Sarimento

Landscape Designer

As a landscape designer and gardener I'm always on the lookout for those "holy grail" plants that provide four season interest, fit well in your average property and add functional value. Our state tree, the so called Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), is one of those holy grail plants that often finds its way into many of my projects.

Starting with flowers in brilliant shades of fuschia, magenta and pink, followed by heart shaped leaves that provide beautiful fall colors, this tree provides something for every season. Even in winter, the tree's form and greyish brown bark provide a stark skeletal beauty, perfect for the dormant season.

Although a member of the Fabaceae (legume) family, there seems to be some confusion about Redbuds ability to fix nitrogen. The consensus seems to be that they do not. Nonetheless, Redbuds early blooms are an important source of nectar and the leaves are a larval food source for Henry's Elfin butterfly. The flowers, young pods and leaves are also fit for human consumption. They can be eaten raw, pickled or cooked. The flowers taste a bit like broccoli florets and the seed pods are not unlike the flavor and texture of peas. All of the edible parts of the tree do contain saponins, so it is best to eat them in moderation, especially when eating them raw. The bark and other parts are said to have herbal medicinal qualities. The wood of Redbuds cures to a nice hard wood with attractive color and grain that could be used for furniture, basketry and other small woodworking projects.

Due to the Redbuds relatively small stature and open habit, a place in almost any landscape can be found for them. There are many cultivars and selections of Redbud with many variations in flower (even white variants) and leaf color. Some of these like the red leaved 'Forest Pansy' variety seem to require a more shaded understory location. Your native local eco type or the varieties 'Oklahoma' or 'Texas' seem to be the most adaptable, durable and long living. The only question I have about Redbuds is why they are called red? I've yet to see one remotely red and don't get me started on the story behind it's other common name "the Judas tree."



*Cercis canadensis*

Photo: OU Biosurvey

## Connections

Marilyn Stewart

### *Sassafras albinum*

How can anyone not love Sassafras? Every part of this gorgeous tree, from root to branch tip has been utilized for culinary and medicinal purposes. The wood has been treasured and used across the world.

The roots and bark smell and taste like root beer and were historically used as such until the active compound, (Safrole) which is found in the oil and gives it this flavor, was banned by the FDA for commercial use because it is a possible carcinogen. The dried ground leaves of Sassafras are the sole ingredient of File powder, a flavoring and thickening ingredient of gumbo. The leaves and flowers can be used in salads and Sassafras tea.

Sassafras has a long history of medicinal use; wound treatment, acne, fevers, urinary disorders, swelling, arthritis, dysentery, sexually transmitted diseases, high blood pressure and chronic coughing. The flavor was added to other medicines to make them more palatable. Twigs were used as toothbrushes.

The wood itself is highly flammable and the twigs can be used as a fire-starter—a handy use for your worn out toothbrush, perhaps? The wood grain is beautiful and has been used for furniture and shipbuilding. In colonial times Sassafras was second only to tobacco as the top export to Europe.

Sassafras is a smallish tree, rarely reaching more than 40 feet (the record is 58 feet with a circumference of 152 inches in McCurtain County) and has distinctive leaves; some are mitten shaped, some have two lobes while some are elliptical. Its native range is eastern Oklahoma and is commonly found in oak and hickory forests and clearings. The color in the fall is a spectacular bright orange and red. It is also a host plant for the Spicebush Swallowtail butterfly.

### OCU Student Receives Paul Buck Award

Laura E. Jardine is the recipient of the 2016 Paul Buck Award. Miss Jardine is a student at Oklahoma City University. Her paper, delivered as an oral presentation during the Collegiate Biological Section of the Oklahoma Academy of Science held on November 4, 2016 in Tulsa, was entitled "Effects of Fire Intensity on Habitat Recovery in a Mixed Grass Ecosystem."

The Paul Buck Award is given annually by ONPS to the graduate or undergraduate college student presenting the most outstanding paper in the field of botany entered in the Biological Section of the Technical Meeting of the Oklahoma Academy of Science. The award is given in memory of Dr. Paul Buck, professor of botany at the University of Tulsa and highly respected member of Oklahoma's botanical community. A cash award in the amount of \$250.00 is presented to the recipient.

Chairman of the Collegiate Section of the Oklahoma Academy of Science is Dr. Adam Ryburn, immediate past state president of ONPS.

## Conservation Corner

Chad Cox

My suggestion to the board for a website list of native plants suitable for landscaping was approved. The first issue of this list is a duplication of the offerings from the Wild Things Nursery run by Marilyn and Ken Stewart in Seminole. This list will be expanded in the future to include other plants that can be considered for landscaping as well. Suggestions for plants will be welcomed: send to [Chadwick.cox@cox.net](mailto:Chadwick.cox@cox.net). Indicate why you are suggesting they be included.

There is another list on the website for native aquatic species that might be suitable for waterscaping your pond, these are plants that live in water. Aquatics can be categorized by how they grow in the water and the list specifies the category of the species to aid in selecting them for their display. Those categories and a common example of each are given here:

Free floating upon the water surface, duckweeds

Free floating submerged, coon's tail

Rooted, submerged, water nymphs

Rooted, upper portion floating at surface but primarily submerged, pondweeds

Rooted, upper portion primarily floating upon surface, lily pads

Erect and emerged from the water, cattails

If you know of other native aquatic species, pass these along.

*I would be pleased to have any help with these lists if you are interested. In fact, we really need more members for the committee as well as suggestions for other projects.*

**Contributions to the Paul Buck Fund which is housed in the ONPS treasury are always encouraged and welcomed, since from these contributions will future awards be funded.**

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