

# OBSERVATIONS

*from the Tierra Grande Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist*

*Volume 1, 2016*

## UPCOMING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

**April 2 at 9:00 am Trash-Off!** TGMN will be cleaning up our stretch of Highway 118 north of Alpine. We will meet by our sign at the southern boundary of our section of the highway, about 5 miles out of Alpine.

**April 9 at 9:00 am** is the **Cattail Rodeo at Balmorhea State Park**. We will be cutting cattails and cleaning up any trash in the cienega and in the channels. We should finish on Saturday, but if you would like to spend the night and continue clean up the following day, please let Tara know. She will contact the state park to see if we can block campsites. All equipment will be provided for you, but if you would like to bring waders, please do. Dress for the weather. We will meet at Balmorhea at 9am to start chopping! Please contact Tara if you are able to help. She would like to have a head count for planning the day's work.  
([tara.poloskey@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:tara.poloskey@tpwd.texas.gov); 432-426-3337 ext. 224)

**April 23** is the second annual **Mile High Chili Cook Off at Davis Mountains State Park**. This is a Chili Appreciation Society International (CASI) event. Contests include Best Chili, Best Beans, Best Salsa, and Best In Show. Park visitors can sample each of the competitors' recipes by purchasing a "Throw Down Pack" for a \$4/person donation. Your pack includes a cup, spoon, bottle of water and a napkin. All donations will go directly to benefit the park and its visitors. **Musical entertainment will start at noon and chili tasting begins at 1:00 pm.** For more information and volunteer opportunities, contact Jacob Barton at [jacob.barton@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:jacob.barton@tpwd.texas.gov).

### QUARTERLY CHAPTER MEETING AND PROGRAM SATURDAY, APRIL 9, 1-2PM

Immediately following the Cattail Rodeo.  
Please see the calendar for more details.

<http://txmn.org/tierra/calendar>

# MESQUITE

**FREE FOOD! FREE FOOD!**



## HARVEST NATIVE BOUNTY

Drylands Educator and Desert Harvesters Co-Founder, Brad Lancaster, presented a **MESQUITE WORKSHOP & NATIVE-FOODS TALK** to interested community members last September. Brad's workshop was sponsored in part by the Tierra Grande Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist.

He has a great website on the native foods of the desert. [www.desertharvesters.org](http://www.desertharvesters.org)

Also, check out his website on Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond. [www.harvestingrainwater.com](http://www.harvestingrainwater.com)



## Harvesting Mesquite Tips



- Pick ripe pods from the tree, never the ground.
- Ripe pods are dry and brittle and come off the tree easily. Ripe pods will come off with a gentle pull. If you have to pull hard, they're not ready yet.
- Don't harvest from the ground, areas with high volumes of vehicle traffic, or areas with suspected use of pesticides or herbicides, or polluted runoff. Avoid trees in questionable areas.
- Since the flavor of mesquite pods can vary widely from one tree to the next, you should taste a pod from a tree before you pick.
- Pods can taste sweet, bitter, sour, or nutty. In general, the sweeter pods are better.
- Taste as you go!
- Don't rinse the pods!

Follow us on Facebook!

[www.facebook.com/TMNTG](http://www.facebook.com/TMNTG)



## Mesquite Recipes

*from TGMN member Susan Penney*

Susan brought two of the mesquite treats that we were able to sample at the mesquite workshop with Brad Lancaster. They were amazing! She agreed to share her recipes with us. Thank you Susan!!

Susan collects her own mesquite in Fort Davis and sends it to Arizona for grinding. She also buys mesquite online at: [www.mesquiteflour.com](http://www.mesquiteflour.com)

### **Mesquite Pecan Crackers**

Posted by Amy Valdes Schwemm in Edible Baja Arizona Magazine

- 1/2 cup mesquite flour
- 1/2 cup pecan meal
- 2 tablespoons seeds (I used a blend of sesame, flax and hemp.)
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoons olive oil (I used a blend of olive oil and coconut oil.)
- 1/2 teaspoon Gulf of California salt (I used pink Hawaiian sea salt.)

- 1) Mix everything and refrigerate. You can add a tablespoon of water, if necessary, to make a stiff dough.
- 2) Chill the dough thoroughly.
- 3) Roll out between two sheets of wax paper.
- 4) Remove the top layer of paper and cut into shapes with a knife or cookie cutter.
- 5) Bake on a lined cookie sheet in a preheated oven (375 degrees) for 6-8 minutes.

## **Chocolate Chip Mesquite Cookies**

Adapted from [Super Natural Cooking](#) (Ten Speed) by Heidi Swanson and David Lebovitz

This makes a lot of cookie dough, so feel free to freeze half of the dough in a zip-top bag for use another time. Tip: If you form them into mounds first, then freeze them, you can simply pop them onto a baking sheet later on. Also, feel free also to chop up your own chocolate and use those bits in place of the chips.

Mesquite flour is definitely wonderful in these cookies and if you do get some, you won't be disappointed. However I have also made them with buckwheat flour, which you can do if you wish.

- 2½ cups (330 g) flour (I use a blend of whole wheat and spelt)
- 1 cup (160 g) mesquite flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ¾ teaspoon fine sea salt
- 8 ounces (220 g) unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 2 cups (400 g) natural cane sugar
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 cups (230 g) rolled oats or a mixture of rolled grains
- 2 cups (360 g) chocolate chips

Two baking sheets covered with parchment paper or lined with silicone baking mats. Preheat the oven to 375F (190C).

1. In a bowl, whisk together the flours, baking powder, baking soda and salt.
2. With an electric mixer, or by hand, beat the butter until soft. Add the sugar and beat until creamy. If using a mixer, stop it once or twice and scrape down the sides.
3. Add the eggs one at a time until completely incorporated, then the vanilla.
4. Add the flour mixture in three batches, incorporating it as you go.
5. Mix in the oats and chocolate chips. The dough is quite stiff at this point and if you're not using a powerful standing electric mixer, you may wish to roll up your sleeves and use your hands, like I did.
6. Drop mounds, about two tablespoons of dough each, evenly spaced onto the baking sheet.
7. Bake for 10-12 minutes, until just beginning to set. Heidi's admonition in her recipe should be ringing in your ears at this point..."Don't overbake these; if anything, underbake them" certainly holds true.

Oh yes, and David's secret: Here's a tip to help keep chocolate chip cookies moist when they cool: When you pull the cookies out of the oven, take a spatula and tap the top of each cookie once, very lightly, to flatten any peaks and level them.

Then let them cool as usual for the moistest, chewiest chocolate chip cookies imaginable!

### Mesquite Advice from Susan

- Follow Brad's suggestions: taste as you go, collect before the rainy season, and never pick pods from the ground.
- Check out the website: [www.mesquiteflour.com](http://www.mesquiteflour.com)  
They have an amazing selection of mesquite flours.
- A baking tip when adapting a recipe for mesquite is not to exchange the flour with 100% mesquite flour. It just doesn't behave like regular flour.
- Do experiment - the results are always fun (well, almost always ;-p)!

### Interesting Facts about Mesquite

*From Medicinal Uses of Mesquite by John Slattery*

- Mesquite tea can be used to treat wounds.
- The pods, leaves, or flowers can be used to make an eyewash for treating sore eyes and conjunctivitis (pink eye.)
- A juice made from mesquite can help in the recovery of an intestinal illness, abdominal surgery, sore throat, laryngitis, and peptic ulcers. It can also be used topically for wounds, sores, sunburns, and sore eyes.
- Mesquite flour is gluten-free and high in insoluble fiber, which means it has a low glycemic load.
- Chewing mesquite leaves and swallowing the juice can alleviate indigestion.

## WHY WE REPORT HOURS – Info from TMN

The Texas Master Naturalist Program is funded through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Federal Aid grants program. For a state to be eligible to receive assistance under this particular grant, the state must provide a "match" of 25% of the grant total received. In other words, this grant pays \$0.75 for every \$0.25 that is submitted as a match. Our volunteer service hours provide this match.

The funding supports the **TMN Program**, its state staff and interns; the Urban Wildlife Program, the Nature Trackers Programs and the Wildscapes Program--just to name a few.

Currently, the in-kind value of each hour that you report is \$23.00. Statewide, in 2014, our 45 chapters reported over 398,800 hours, which amounted to more than \$9.17 MILLION in value.

Prior to VMS, only a fraction of the TMN service hours reported were able to be substantiated and used to match our federal grant. The VMS system should allow us to be more compliant and enable us to capitalize on additional grant funding through this and other sources. Properly reported service hours with the correct federal categories applied can have a multiplier effect in the overall budget, so every unreported hour is a missed conservation opportunity!

In addition to matching the Federal grant, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service also reports TMN activity monthly to the state legislature and local county commissions which use those numbers to determine funding both statewide and locally. Additionally, the hours are used to support your local Extension office.

~~~~~

### From Rosemary Dennis – TGMN VMS Administrator:

Forty hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of advanced training are required each year to either initially certify or re-certify. After all, it's all about the pins!

Class of 2015 members have until the end of 2016 to obtain their initial certification. By the way, if you double the requirements by achieving 80 hours of volunteer service and 16 hours of advanced training, you will receive your initial certification dragonfly pin, *and* that year's re-certification pin.

### **Please be part of the success and use VMS!**

If you need help getting started or have questions, please contact me, Rosemary, via email at [rosemary.dennis@ymail.com](mailto:rosemary.dennis@ymail.com), or by phone at [432-426-3884](tel:432-426-3884). If you have hours that have aged out (older than the 45-day input limit) please contact, me. I can help you get them entered.



## ADVANCED TRAINING HOURS



Linda Hedges is the new Advanced Training Committee Chair. This is in addition to taking care of the calendar and communications for TGMN. Thank you Linda!! Here is an update on advanced training hours.

Educational programs at state and national parks are suitable for advanced training credit. State park programs are on the TPWD calendar of events; you can search by park, by date, by activity, etc.

Texas Parks Wildlife Department:

<http://tpwd.texas.gov/calendar/state-park-events>

Davis Mountains State Park:

<http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/davis-mountains>

For National Parks, you have to go to the individual park page and then find their list of programs.

Big Bend National Park main page:

<http://www.nps.gov/bibe/index.htm> and program page:

<http://www.nps.gov/bibe/planyourvisit/interp-programs.htm>.

Guadalupe Mountains National Park main page:

<http://www.nps.gov/gumo/index.htm> and calendar page:

<http://www.nps.gov/gumo/planyourvisit/calendar.htm>

If you are heading to one of the parks for a special program or activity, you might want to call ahead to be sure that there are no last-minute changes to the program.



## EARTH DAY - April 22, 2016



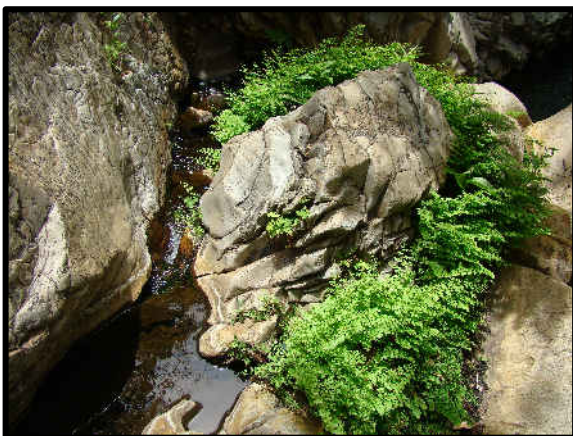
The following images are from Earth Day 2015 in Brewster County at Big Bend National Park. (All photos are by Petei Guth)



Orchid - *Epipactis gigantea*.



Longspur columbine - *Aquilegia gigantea*.



Maidenhair fern (*Adiantum capillus verneris*) surrounds a boulder in the creek.



Prickly pear - *Opuntia azurea* var.





Cooper broomrape – *Orobanche cooperi*.



Rock wall of pool at Cattail Falls.



Ripples on pool surface.



Orchids, Columbine and Maidenhair fern mix along pool edge.



Range ratany – *Krameria glandulosa*.



Thicketleaf penstemon – *Penstemon dasyphyllus*.

### **TRAINING SCHEDULE FOR THE CLASS OF 2016**

Introduction, Davis Mountains State Park, July 30  
Nature Conservancy, Davis Mountains Preserve, August 19-21  
Balmorhea State Park, September 10-11  
Elephant Mountain WMA, September 30- October 2  
Big Bend Ranch State Park, October 21-23

The 2016 application will be available online soon.

<http://txmn.org/tierra/how-to-join/>

## **2016 Tierra Grande Chapter Officers, Advisors, and Committee Chairs**

President: Albert G. Bork  
Vice-President: Toni Arnold  
Secretary: Cheryl Trotter  
Treasurer: Chris Pipes  
Past-President: Pam Pipes

### **Advisors**

Billy Tarrant, TPWD  
Louis Harveson, SRSU  
Patt Sims  
Jennifer Baur  
Steve Elfring  
Cassie Honolka, TPWD

### **Committee Chairs**

Awards and Recognition: Rosemary Dennis  
Calendar and Communications: Linda Hedges  
Facebook subcommittee: Dave Taylor  
Historian: vacant  
Host: Carol Slocomb  
Membership: Rosemary Dennis  
Newsletter: Kate Mahoney  
Outreach: Jill Goodwin  
Programs: Anne Adkins  
TGMN VMS Administrator: Rosemary Dennis  
TGMN DMSP Friends: Dave Mainz  
Advanced Training: Linda Hedges  
Volunteer Service Projects: Rosemary Dennis

New, stories, photos, and ideas are welcome.

Please e-mail them to Kate Mahoney, [ka\\_mahoney@yahoo.com](mailto:ka_mahoney@yahoo.com)