



GOOD WATER MASTER NATURALIST  
WILLIAMSON COUNTY

RIPPLES

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- 3/12/15 NPSOT Meeting
- 3/16/15 NPAT Meeting
- 3/25/15 GWMN Book Club
- 3/26/15 GWMN Chapter Meeting
- 4/9/15 NPSOT Meeting
- 4/20/15 NPAT Meeting
- 4/23/15 GWMN Chapter Meeting
- 5/11/15 Williamson Audubon Group
- 5/14/15 NPSOT Meeting
- 5/18/15 NPAT Meeting

Check the website for additional events including volunteer and training opportunities. The many events are way too numerous to even think about posting all here!

NOW YOU KNOW

Sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) is the state grass of Texas. This short blue-green prairie grass is common throughout the Western Hemisphere with a range from Canada south to Argentina. It is named for its spiky oat-like seeds which extend almost horizontally from one side of the stalk. Sideoats grama is a common rangeland forage. It is relatively drought resistant and able to flourish in a variety of soil types. This robustness as well as attractive purple and orange flowers make this grass popular in wildlife gardens. It also hosts Green Skipper and Dotted Skipper butterfly larvae.

Gault Site Volunteering by S.D. Wiseman

A quiet valley and spring fed stream at the Gault Site near present day Florence, TX have given humans a safe place to live and work for thousands of years. The San Marcos Gault Lab house over 2.6 million artifacts collected from this site. A member of the Fall 2014 Good Water Master Naturalist Training Class shared with us her experience volunteering in the lab. In addition to opportunities to volunteer in the San Marcos Gault Lab, there are also opportunities to participate in flora and fauna counts or even serve as a docent at the Gault Site itself.

*To accumulate volunteer hours for my Master Naturalist certification, I volunteered at the San Marcos Gault Lab to wash and sort the artifacts that were found at the 'dig'. The Gault Site is no longer being excavated because they hit bedrock and can dig no further.*



*All of the artifacts are in large plastic bags with identifying documentation written on the bag. Each bag has an orange tag identifying where the artifacts were found and a page in a notebook identifying every artifact. The larger artifacts have their own plastic bag. Smaller artifacts are screened by size to sort.*

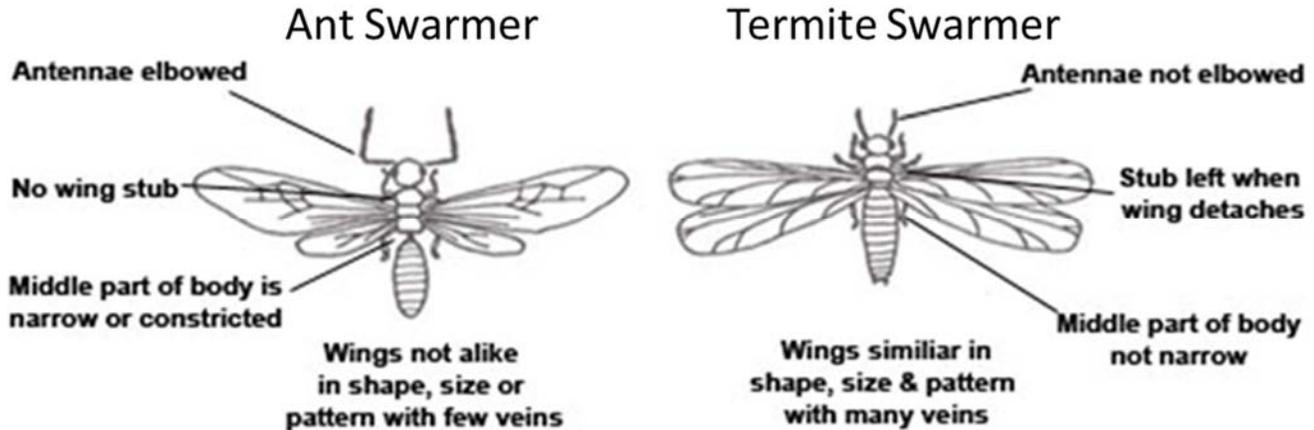
*The first step is taking an artifact bag from this shelf and checking off each artifact corresponds to the list of artifacts in the notebook. Notice the dent I made – this shelf was full of plastic when I started!*

*Once all of the artifacts have been checked off the list, I put them on a wooden rack covered with newspaper and move to the sink area where I wash them. Once the artifacts have been washed and placed on the drying rack, the rack is transferred to a shelving unit to dry and then, once dry, they are sorted further by Gault Lab staff.*



## Ants or Termites by Wizzie Brown

Soon ant and termite swarmers will be seen flying in Central Texas. "Swarmers" is another term used to describe the reproductive stage of ants and termites. These insects have wings when they initially leave the colony, but the wings are either shed (by termites) or chewed off (by ants) before they form a new colony. Some people may have trouble distinguishing the two types of insects, but with a few key characteristics, it can be very simple.



Ant swarmers have elbowed antennae and a narrow, or constricted, waist. The front and back wings of ants are not similar in size or shape and have few veins. If the wings are missing from the ant swarmer, there will not be a wing stub left on the thorax from where the wing was attached.

Termite swarmers have antennae that are not elbowed and the waist is not narrowed. The wings on termites are of similar size and shape and have many veins. Termite swarmers have a wing stub left on the thorax once the wing detaches from the body.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at [www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com](http://www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com)

## Texabama Croton by Dr Chuck Saxton from Friends of Balcones Land Blog



The flowers to the left are those of Texabama croton, one of our rarest and earliest blooming shrubs. These crotons begin to bloom about the same time we see the first blooms of spring herald (*Forestiera pubescens*) and agarita (*Berberis trifoliolata*). Crotons, like many other plants in the Euphorb family, are not eaten by much. The shrub is amazingly immune to deer browse.

Like most of these early flowering shrubs, the croton is a very good butterfly plant at this season. To date, we have only documented one species of butterfly which utilizes the foliage as a larval food plant, the Goatweed Butterfly.

"Goatweed" is a common name for several species of croton. The picture on the right shows a single Goatweed Butterfly egg under a croton leaf.

## American Sycamore Tree by Mary Ann Melton

The American Sycamore tree, *Platanus occidentalis* L. is a tall stately tree growing between 60-100 feet tall. They are in the plant family, Platanaceae, one of the oldest plant families at over 100 million years. Sycamores grow quickly and can live for hundreds of years. The crowns are wide with spreading crooked branches. The trunk diameters of sycamore trees are the largest for any native hardwood tree. Older trees can reach 2-4 feet in diameter. The current record specimen has a diameter of 11 feet but previous record specimens were 15 feet in diameter. It is found in all the states east of the Great Plains except Minnesota.

The leaves are huge with 3 to 5 lobes. The leaf shape is palmate, resembling a hand. Leaf edges are wavy with teeth. They look much like maple leaves but are much larger. Leaves are simple and grow alternately on the branches. The bark is white and smooth and peels off in large flakes leaving varying color splotches of brown green or gray. The tree is monoecious which means it has both male pistils and female stamens on the same plant. The flowers in the spring are green balls that turn red. They form a 1 inch round fruit that gives the tree the nickname of buttonwood. The fruit forms from the female flowers from the previous year. The fruit breaks apart to release the seeds, which are achenes. Sycamore achenes are tipped with clusters of hairs that allow them to be dispersed by the wind or water. Foraging animals also disperse the seeds. Sycamore achenes can cause skin irritation and respiratory distress in some people.

Sycamore trees are resistant to pollution and salty soil. They are often found in forests and along the edges of streams. They prefer moist soil and are not drought tolerant. Because native sycamore trees are prone to leaf light from spring anthracnose disease it is recommend to plant resistant hybrid cultivars Columbia or Bloodgood. Sycamores should not be planted next to concrete driveways or sidewalks because they grow rapidly and will cause cracking.



Sycamores are beneficial to wildlife. America Goldfinches, Carolina Chickadees Purple Finches, Mallards, Beavers, Muskrats and Gray Squirrels eat their seeds. Beavers also eat the bark. Small animals live in the warped twisting branching structure. As the trees age the trunk becomes hollow providing homes for pileated woodpecker, barred owl, great crested flycatchers, chimney swifts and raccoons.

People use sycamore wood for furniture, flooring, butcher blocks, particleboard, crates, and baskets.

## GOOD WATER MASTER NATURALISTS IN THE NEWS

### *Keep Taylor Beautiful President's Award*

In January, Keep Taylor Beautiful voted The Good Water Master Naturalists as the annual President's Award recipient for 2014 for the volunteer work at the Liberty Garden in Murphy Park in Taylor. Members Pat Shirk and Bonnie Sladek spent many hours working at the Liberty Garden. At the annual Taylor Chamber of Commerce banquet and awards ceremony, Jim Rudd and Amy Landis presented the award to Bonnie and Pat on behalf of the chapter.

The Liberty Garden was added in Murphy Park about ten years ago as a memorial to United States veterans. Plans were made last year to add Texas native butterfly plants and a water feature that would provide moisture for the butterflies. Good Water Master Naturalists, Taylor citizens, and youth groups participated in the project. The native plants will reseed each year providing natural food for the beautiful butterflies.

The Liberty Garden is an ongoing project with regular maintenance provided by Good Water Master Naturalist volunteers. During 2014 Good Water members, Pat Shirk, Bonnie Sladek, Sterlin and Merrilyn Barton, and Dave and Gail McAdoo worked on maintaining this beautiful garden.



For information about the Good Water Chapter  
<http://txmn.org/goodwater> or [goodwatermn2@gmail.com](mailto:goodwatermn2@gmail.com)