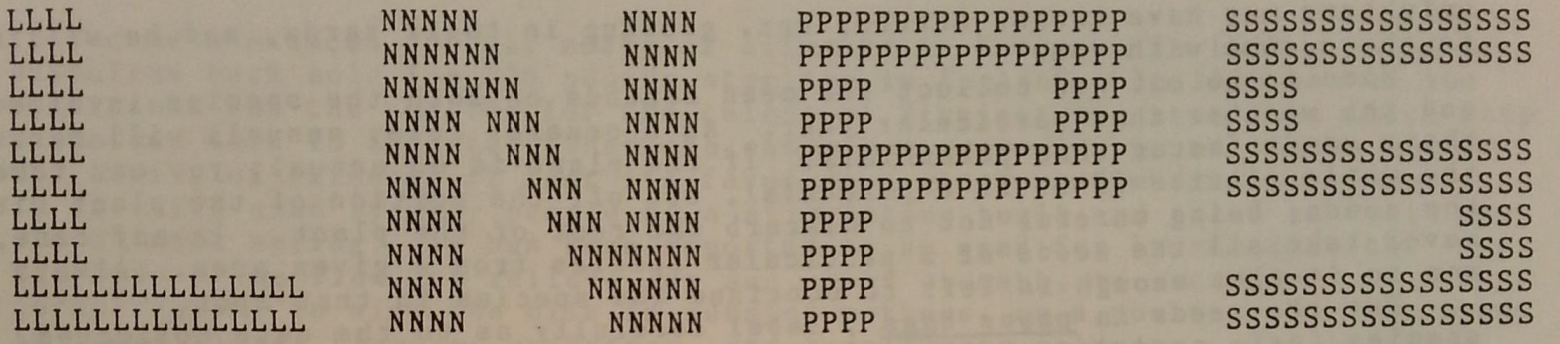

SUMMER 1989

NEWSLETTER

volume 7, number 2

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DON'T FORGET YOUR DUES!

If you know anyone who is interested in joining the LNPS, give them our Treasurer's address. Make the $5 check payable to the Louisiana Native Plant Society, and send it to our Treasurer:

Elinor Herd
239 Pomeroy
Shreveport, Louisiana 71115

DEADLINES FOR NEXT 4 NEWSLETTERS:

Don't forget! In an effort to better coordinate the distribution of information concerning field trips as well as other dated information the newsletter uses the following deadline policy. Any information received after the deadline will be included in the next newsletter . Deadlines for the next four newsletters are as follows:

Fall Newsletter:	September 1, 1989
Winter Newsletter:	December 1, 1989
Spring Newsletter:	March 1, 1990
Summer Newsletter:	June 1, 1990

Every effort will be made to have the newsletters in the mail within 7 days following the deadline. Your editor's address is:

David Heikamp
717 Giuffrias
Metairie, La. 70001

DON'T FORGET TO SEND IN THOSE SEEDS YOU'VE COLLECTED!

Last year's exchange was a big success, and with more cooperation, this year will be even better. Pay attention to where various wildflowers are blooming, and keep notes as to where they are. If you can somehow mark the spot, or tag the plant with a weather-resistant tag, so much the better. Even in a big city there are many opportunities to collect seed. Some of your

neighbors may have trees, shrubs, etc. growing in their yards, and be willing to share some with you.

When to go out and collect the seed depends on both the species involved, and the weather that particular year. As a general rule, annuals will mature their seeds faster than perennials. If the plant is an annual, you can take the whole plant. If it is a perennial, cut off the portion of the plant with the seeds, being careful not to disturb the rest of the plant. In any case, never take all the seeds of a particular species from a given area. Always see to it that enough is left to continue the species in that spot.

Put the seeds in paper bags , label carefully as to the date collected, species (or a good description of the plant), your name for future reference, and where it was collected. When you get home, store the seeds in a cool, dry place. It is generally not necessary to refrigerate them, and in no case store them in a sealed container or plastic bag, as they will mold. Clean the seeds as much as possible. A regular sieve from the kitchen is very good for this.

Finally, send the seeds you collect to Annette Parker, our Seed Exchange Chairman, at the address below. Do not send them in an envelope, the post office will crush the vast majority of them if you do - use a small box!

Annette Parker
Rt. 1, Box 332
Anacoco, Louisiana 71403

THE LAURACEAE OF LOUISIANA

by R. Dale Thomas and
Charles M. Allen

The Lauraceae is a large family with up to 50 genera and 2,000 species found throughout the tropical and subtropical regions of the world. This family has alternate entire-margined leaves (may be lobed but not toothed) that may be evergreen or deciduous. Camphor trees and red bays have evergreen leaves while spice bushes and sassafras have deciduous leaves. All members of this family produce aromatic oils that give the leaves, wood, and especially the bark, of each genus a distinctive odor and taste. This is a primitive family going back to the Cretaceous and in historical times it has been a very important family used in spices and medicines.

Sassafras (Sassafras albidum) is widespread throughout the eastern part of the United States. Its seeds are eaten by birds and deposited in fence-rows and in waste areas. It does best as a primary succession plant and usually dies out when the climax forest develops. It probably has always been an inhabitant of openings in woods. It produces a mucilage that is pleasant to the taste and the dried young leaves and tender twigs can be powdered and used to thicken soups and are the file in file gumbo. Its twigs are chewed by youngsters, hunters, and even field botanists as a thirst quenching agent when water is not available. Country women use these twigs to brush their teeth. The wood shrinks less than any other American hardwood when dried and as such is useful to make cabinets and boats. Its texture is somewhat like that of mahogany and it is excellent for book shelves. Its odor was esteemed to be useful in controlling bedbugs so it was extensively used as bedposts and as floors for houses. In making lye soap, the pioneers used only sassafras wood to stir the concoction. Poles were used to make chicken roosts to control chicken lice. The split logs were used for fence posts, rails, and as sticks on which to hang tobacco in the burley belt. The pleasant taste and odor was supposed to ward off evil (this rather than evil was thought to cause diseases) and thus soon after the discovery of sassafras in the new world,

it became a panacea for all sorts of ailments in Europe. In 1602 a pound of sassafras bark sold for 336 pounds sterling in England. In 1610 one of the conditions for the charter for the colony of Virginia was that John Smith ship sassafras bark to England. When the sassafras proved to be of little use in the curing of ailments it lost its favor as a widespread medicine. However, it is still used by many people as a stimulating tonic and a tea to "thin the blood" each spring. It has been reported to be used for bronchitis, to increase urine flow, to relieve gas and upset stomach, to increase perspiration, to slow the milk in nursing mothers, as a poultice for the eyes, to treat kidney trouble, dysentery, and respiratory ailments. The tea is usually made from small roots and most of the flavoring comes from the bark. The roots were cut in short pieces and the thin outer bark removed and then the blocks were split into small sticks. These were spread out and were wet with boiling water and allowed to dry. This causes the wood to turn bright red and gives the tea a red color that is much more appealing than the pale color obtained from fresh roots. The prepared sticks can be stored for up to five years for future use. The oil of sassafras in this plant was the first flavoring for root beer (this flavor is now made synthetically) and has had a wide use in the flavoring of medicines and candies and in providing a pleasant odor for perfumes and soaps. The oil causes dead twigs to burn readily and thus can be used to start a fire even in the rain. Dry twigs are also useful as a charcoal starter. Sassafras, and most other members of this family, produce a chemical known as safrole (p-allylyn ethylenediazobenzene) which has been shown to be a carcinogen in laboratory mice. One should be aware of the cancer-producing properties of this material before he drinks large amounts of sassafras tea.

Spice bush, Lindera benzoin , is a small shrub that is quite common along the streams of north Louisiana. Its twigs smell like benzoic acid and hence its species name. Its leaves were used as a tea substitute during the Revolutionary War and its seeds were used as a substitute for allspice during the Civil War. Spice bush flowers before the leaves appear. Its flowers and leaves make it a desirable shrub for cultivation in our yards. A decoction of the bark, twigs, or fruit was used to stimulate blood circulation, increase perspiration, and to treat intestinal worms, dysentery, coughs, and colds. Its twigs are pleasant to nibble. Another species, Lindera melissifolium , grows in swampy woods in the eastern United States and was once collected in Louisiana near the Ouchita River along the Arkansas border. No modern record of this plant is known from the state. A recently described species, Lindera subcoriacea , occurs in Washington Parish near Franklinton. A close relative of the spice bush, Litsea aestivalis , is known from southern Mississippi, and may have been part of our past flora.

Red Bay, Persea palustrus , is common in the bay gall habitats of the pine woods of central Louisiana. It also occurs in the marshes around Houma and in southeastern Louisiana. There are two species (Persea palustris and Persea borbonia) or the two plants are classified as two varieties of the same species. The leaves of this evergreen plant are very useful as a substitute for bay leaves (Laurus nobilis) in cooking. This shrub makes a nice "dogwood-sized" ornamental with evergreen leaves and should be used in the landscape for anyone who uses bay leaves in cooking.

Camphor tree, Cinnamomum camphora , is an evergreen introduced tree that is very aromatic. Its shining green leaves are attractive but it is sensitive to cold weather and it has been killed to the ground as far south as Lake Charles in the coldest of our winters. However, it continues to survive in Monroe, although it regularly dies back to the roots. This tree is the source of camphor which is produced comercially in Formosa, China, and Japan by steam distillation. The camphor is used to soften plastics, plastic films, and in

nitrocellulose explosives. It is used in cosmetics and medicines because of its odor and its antiseptic properties. About half of today's camphor is made synthetically from turpentine. Camphor and gum asafetida were worn in a small bag around the neck of country children to ward off colds. Camphor is reported to be somewhat antiseptic and to act as a circulatory stimulant and to have a calming effect in cases of hysteria, general nervousness, and neuralgia. The distilled oil has been used to treat diarrhea, rheumatism, and muscular pains. Small doses act to stimulate respiration; large doses can be toxic by stopping respiration. It is widely used for "fever blisters" and as an ointment for sore muscles.

Cinnamon (Cinnamomum zeylanicum) is made from the bark of a plant in the Lauraceae. The cinnamon in the Bilbical world came from cassia (Cinnamomum cassia). Cinnamon was once more valuable than gold and has been prized as an embalming compound by the Egyptians and others. It is now our most widely used spice, especially in pastries. Most of it comes from Sri Lanka and India.

Sassafras , Persea , and Lindera are all worthy of cultivation in our yards. Cinnamomum (all three species) and the true bay (Laurus nobilis) can be cultivated in the southern part of our state.

NORTHWEST CHAPTER NEWS

by Karlene Defatta

The Northwest Chapter of the LNPS held their annual plant sale on Thursday, March 24, 1989. The money made goes to help pay for Chapter expenses. Memebers brought a big assortment of plants to the sale, and they were sold for 50 cents or $1 each. The sale netted $170.00.

On Saturday, April 1, 1989, thirteen members of the LNPS met at Hodges Gardens to help create a wildflower garden. The garden is located besides a lake, and a sign "Natural Gardens" shows you the way down rock steps into the area. In the background, huge flowering dogwoods and wild azaleas bloom in profusion. The beds were laid out according to the plans drawn up by LNPS's John Mayronne, and the paths are lined with pine straw. The work was fairly easy, and lots of fun. A wide variety of plants were brought by members. Hodges Gardens personnel will water the plants, and will also trim up some trees in the area to allow more sunlight into the area. Members planned a return trip in three weeks to plant some more plants.

A trip to Austin, Texas, April 14 to 16, 1989 was enjoyed by the eight members of the LNPS who made the trip. Texas roadsides were beautiful with Bluebonnets, Indian Paint Brushes, Ragworts, Winecups, Phlox, Verbena, Wooly Violet, and Coreopsis. On Saturday morning, April 15, we visited the Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve, which consists of 250 acres in the middle of Austin. It is home to several species of endangered plants and animals, and is ideally situated on Bee Creek. Two and a half miles of paths pass through woodlands, grasslands, and streamside habitat. Our guide, Nancy Blue, was a bird watcher. Members saw the Ladderback Woodpecker, Scrub Jay, Ruffus-sided Towhee, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Cedar Waxwing, Turkey Vulture, a falcon, Carolina Chickadee, Black-capped Vireo, and Fox Sparrow. Along the trails we saw lots of wildflowers as well as flowering trees and shrubs. The showy Blackcapped Diasy was everywhere. Brightly colored Spiderworts, Wild Onions, Red Cedar Sage, Verbena, Horsemint, Texas Baby Blue Eyes and Baptisia (yellow) also bloomed along the trails. The plants, trees and shrubs all had thicker leaves than our plants, very interesting. Down the trail to the pond area the oaks were covered with what Texans call "Ball Moss". Really, it's a bromeliad (Tilliandsia sp.). They looked very much like birds' nests. Next we

climbed the trails to the Texas Mountain Laurel area. They weren't in bloom, but there we saw two small streams emptying into a creek creating two waterfalls. Maidenhair Fern copvered the wet areas around the waterfalls. It was a beautiful sight. Saturday evening we visited the Nature Center. It was closed, but we wandered through the grounds and saw native plants and listened to the birds sing. Ball Moss was abundant here too. Later that evening we visited a couple of nurseries, buying native plants to grow in our own wildflower gardens. Sunday we visited a ranch 30 miles outside of Austin where the fields were masses of wildflowers for as far as the eye could see. Next we went to the National Wildflower Research Center where we were given a talk, a slide show and a tour of the grounds where wildflowers are grown. My favorites were the Penstemons, especially Penstemon cobaea and Penstemon triflorus . The latter is an exquisitely beautiful rosy-pink - very large open bells on stems about two feet high. Penstemon cobaea is a very large flower, lavender with deep purple markings in the throat. On the way home we saw many Penstemon cobaea along the highway. Texans can be justly proud of their wildflowers!

WILDFLOWER REFERENCES

by Annette Parker

Wildflowers of the Big Thicket and Western Louisiana is, in my opinion, the most outstanding reference for wildflowers of this region. Written by Gieyeta Ajilvsgi, this book shows more than 450 species in color. Excellent habitat descriptions are a great aid in identification of specimens. The price is $9.95 plus modest postage for a soft cover copy. I consider it a great bargain. "Green Horizons" also carries a wide assortment of wildflower seeds reasonably priced including all the popular species and a few uncommon ones. Many of their book offerings would be of value to the Louisiana plant enthusiast. For more information write to:

Green Horizons
210 Quinlan #571
Kerrville, Texas 78028

MANY SPECIES OVER-COLLECTED

LNPS member Eric Sipco of Jena, Louisiana sent an article in concerning the over-collection from the wild of some of our popular garden bulbs. Some have been collected to the point where they are now threatened in the wild. The NRDC (Natural Resource Defense Council) recommends that gardeners avoid purchasing the following species:

Galanthus elwesii : always of wild origin.
Leucojum vernum
Leucojum aestivum
Narcissus triandrus alba
Narcissus bulbocodium conspicuous
other small species of Narcissus
Sternbergia species
Chionodoxa sardensis
Chionodooxa tmoli
Chionodoxa lucillae
Erythronium species, except "Pagoda"

Fritillaria persica "Adiyamen"
Fritillaria imperialis
other species of Fritillaria
Scilla species : large numbers still exported from Turkey!
Trillium species, especially Trillium grandiflorum
Tulipa hageri
Tulipa praecox
Tulipa pulchella humilis
Blettia striata
Pleione species
Cypripedium species
Cyclamen species, except from specialized nurseries which propagate their stock
Anemone Blanda
Eranthis hyemalis
Eranthis cilicia

WEST/CENTRAL LNPS CHAPTER NEWS

by Darlene Jhanbakhsh

Trip of 3/18/89:

The timing of spring was perfect for what we hoped to see. Perhaps I was the only one mentally holding my breath while driving to the designated area. Would the wild azaleas be in flower? What about the Flowering Dogwood?

Just 20 miles northwest of the Vernon District of the Kisatchie National Forest (Fort Polk) buds were still tight on the azaleas and dogwoods. Despite my anxiety, I noticed that the further south I drove, the more spring was in evidence. The gorgeous blooms and fragrances of spring were there just as Robert Murry said they would be.

We had a very good show of local interest. Everyone enjoyed the tours so amiably and knowledgeably given by Robert Murry and Annette Parker. Some of the plants in flower were the wild azalea, Flowering Dogwood, a large area of white violets, and Silverbell. At the bog site we found pitcher plants, Barbara's Buttons, and Candy Root.

Trip of 5/20/89:

For the early summer meeting the West/Central Chapter was delighted to have guests from Eunice serving as guides. Drs. Charles Allen and Malcolm Vidrine have intensely studied the bog sites at Fort Polk (Vernon District, Kisatchie National Forest). These bogs and upland pine areas held the perfect array of early summer and late summer flowers. Flowering in the bog were pitcher plants, Grass Pink Orchids, Rose Pogonia Orchids, Ladies' Tresses Orchids, Colic Root, and Candy Root. In the upland pine areas we saw purple cone flowers, Pinewoods Lilies, butterfly weed, Indian Blanket, and Black-eyed Susans.

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