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A Newsletter for the Residents of Legend Oaks II

Providing Habitat for the Monarch Butterfly

-LaJuan Tucker, City of Austin and Johanna Arendt, Travis County

Over the past few years, Texas has boasted some of the highest growth rates in the country. Central Texas has seen increased development, urbanization, and economic growth. Natural landscapes are quickly being converted to roadways, housing, and retail.

These dramatic shifts in the landscape are having a significant impact on wildlife. Water sources are being paved over or polluted with runoff. Agricultural lands and native grasslands that provide nesting and foraging sites for birds are increasingly replaced with houses and gas stations. Wildlife now must cross roadways and travel longer distances to find food, shelter, and mates.

There are, however, many ways that residents can help wildlife. Balconies, parks, greenbelts, school yards, and backyards are just a few of the places that can provide important resources for wildlife. As the Central Texas' population continues to grow, so can our responsibility to make sure urban and suburban areas serve not only as economic growth centers, but also as havens for wildlife such as the monarch butterfly.

The iconic monarch butterfly is most famous for its long migrations and its beautiful orange and black markings. Unfortunately, research shows that overall monarch numbers are on the decline. Here in Central Texas, we encounter the monarch butterfly during both its northern and southern migrations, which puts us in a unique position to assist with conservation efforts.

Learn more on November 8, when LaJuan Tucker will be giving a presentation about backyard wildlife at Concordia University. Join us at 6:30pm in Room C270 for a fun, informative program.



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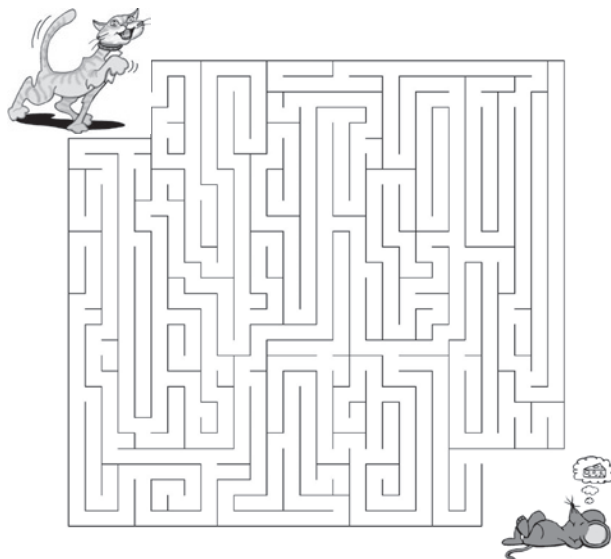
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Kidz Maze Mania

The cat is looking for his old friend, Harry the mouse. Help the cat get through the maze to find Harry as he sleeps.



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NATURE WATCH

A THISTLE EPISTLE

by Jim and Lynne Weber



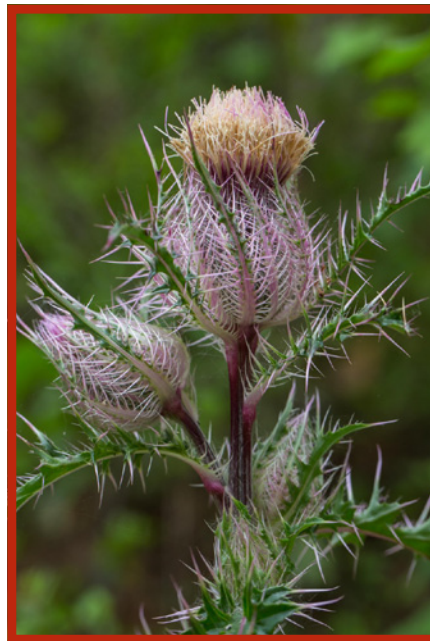
A Mexican Yellow butterfly nectaring on a Texas Thistle.

As one of the most wrongly maligned and misunderstood group of wildflowers, native thistles have never been truly embraced, not even by wildscape gardeners or habitat restoration practitioners. While these plants play a significant role in our ecosystems, they have been a direct casualty of habitat loss, first by plow-based agriculture and followed by the continual development of roads and cities. Further, recent invasions of non-native, exotic thistle species and the inability to discern them from the superficially similar native species, have contributed to their unjustified reputation and ongoing demise.

Native thistles are a beautiful and important group of plants, with subtle blue-green foliage, fascinating stem and leaf architecture, and long-lasting pastel blooms that nourish many species of insects and birds. The nectar they produce is utilized by many species of bees, wasps, butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, spiders, katydids, and hummingbirds, which demonstrates the wide diversity of animals supported by native thistle flowers. In late summer and early fall, they are an essential nectar source for migrating Monarch butterflies. Their persistent seed heads provide the favorite food of goldfinches (both Lesser and American) and other songbirds such as the Carolina Chickadee, and the silky fluff attached to mature seeds is used to line their nests in the spring.

While there are many plants with spines that are erroneously called 'thistles', true thistles belong to the genus *Cirsium*. Of the 62 native species in North America, the most important species in our area are the Texas Thistle (*Cirsium texanum*) and the Yellow Thistle (*Cirsium horridulum*). The Texas Thistle, also called Southern Thistle or Gray Woolly Twintip, is an upright,

unbranched or sparingly branched plant, 2 to 6.5 feet tall, with grayish-green foliage that is spiny and woolly-white below. Violet-pink to deep lavender-rose composite flower heads top the stems from April to August, and are surrounded by bracts that bear a silvery strip down the middle. Texas Thistle is also the larval host plant for the Painted Lady and Mylitta Crescent butterflies. Yellow Thistle, as perhaps foreshadowed by its scientific name, has a host of other, undeserved common names such as Horrid Thistle and Terrible Thistle. It has a branching,



The blooms of the Yellow Thistle are surrounded by a whorl of spiny bracts.

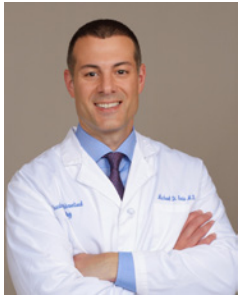
densely hairy stem rising from a 2 foot wide basal rosette, 1 to 5.5 feet tall, with long grayish-green spiny leaves and several large flower heads. Blooming May to August, these composite flower heads are up to 3 inches wide, surrounded by a whorl of spiny, hairy, leaf like bracts, and are frequently red-purple, pink, or white instead of the namesake yellow. In the first year of growth this plant remains a low-lying rosette, and 'bolts' in the spring of the following year to reach its full height. Yellow Thistle is an excellent attractant for Sphinx moths and is the larval host plant for the Little Metalmark and Painted Lady butterflies.

It's time to bring back our native thistles, so this fall consider planting them in your wildscape. These species have evolved with our native pollinators in our natural habitats over thousands of years. As a result, they benefit us by helping to sustain a healthy ecoweb, protecting our water quality, sequestering carbon in our soils, and adding a sublime beauty and structure to our landscapes. And that's our epistle to the thistle!

Send your nature-related questions to naturewatch@austin.rr.com and we'll do our best to answer them. If you enjoy reading these articles, check out our books, *Nature Watch Austin* and *Nature Watch Big Bend* (both published by Texas A&M University Press), and our blog at naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com.

Varicose Veins, Not Just a Cosmetic Issue

By Michael M. Di Iorio, MD, RPVI, RVT, RPhS. Medical director of South Austin Vein Center.

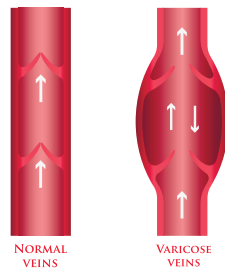


If you suffer from problems related to varicose veins and spider veins you are not alone! Venous insufficiency, also known as venous reflux disease, is the most common cause of varicose veins and affects nearly 30 million adults in the United States.

Veins serve an important function bringing blood back to the heart. We have two sets of veins in our legs, deep veins and superficial veins. These veins have one-way valves that

normally direct blood flow in one direction, toward the heart. When these valves fail blood can flow the wrong way and pool, increasing the pressure in the veins. This is called venous insufficiency and is the driving force behind the development of varicose veins.

Varicose veins are not just a cosmetic issue. They can cause pain, throbbing, heaviness, leg fatigue, restless leg and swelling often worse at the end of the day. In more advanced cases patients can develop skin discoloration and even ulceration.



Risk factors include increasing age, a family history of varicose veins, professions that require long periods of standing or sitting, obesity and in women, pregnancy.

Unfortunately, venous insufficiency and varicose veins are a progressive problem and will only get worse over time. But don't worry treatment is available and covered by most insurances.

Diagnosis begins with a thorough



examination of the legs followed by a venous ultrasound. Ultrasound allows the vein specialist to see under the skin, giving a clear picture of how the veins look and are functioning. Treatment may include one or a combination of minimally invasive procedures. These include endovenous ablation which closes the diseased vein down from the inside with heat, or alternatively, placement of a medical adhesive in the vein to seal it shut. Large ropy veins sometimes need to be removed through tiny incisions in a procedure called ambulatory phlebectomy and sclerotherapy is a procedure where medication is injected into a vein causing it to collapse and eventually be reabsorbed.

All of these procedures are performed in an outpatient setting and often take less than an hour. Pain is minimal and recovery is quick with most people returning to normal activities the same day.

If you would like more information on venous insufficiency and varicose vein treatment please visit www.southaustinvein.com



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