Teacher Key - Native Plants of the Tamaulipan Thornscrub

Plants are an important part of our world. The native plants of South Texas provide habitat for wildlife (shelter and food) and have been a source of many foods, tools and medicines for people. Use this table to help you learn about and remember the plants of the Tamaulipan thornscrub found at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

Name and picture wildlife use human use

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| Allthorn – all parts contain chlorophyll | Shelter, food – fruit, browse | Food - fruit |
| Texas Ebony – large thick seed pods | Larval butterfly host, nests, food (seeds) | Wood, seeds – green (boiled), dry (toasted & ground for coffee), dry - popped |
| Anacua – sandpaper leaves help retain moisture | shelter, fruit, browse | Wood, fruit for preserves |
| Tepeguaje (lead tree) – 30 feet tall | Nectar, shelter, nests, pioneer | Food – leaves, seeds; lumber; leaves - meds for dysentery |
| Brasil | Fruit, nectar, larval host to moth and butterfly | Fuel wood, blue dye from wood; fruit - jelly |
| Huisache | shelter, seed, leaves; larval host to girdling beetle; larval host for butterflies | Perfume, nectar for honey, livestock fodder (18% protein); can be invasive |
| Fiddlewood | Fruit, nectar | remedy for common cold; fiddle construction |
| Texas persimmon | shelter, browse, fruit; larval host for the Gray Hairstreak butterfly | Tools, fruit – food, black dye; astringent tx for diabetes |
| Cenizo (purple sage) – “barometer bush” | Nectar, browse, shelter, larval host for Theona Checkerspot | Hedges, ornamental, It is used as a medicinal plant in Mexico to treat upper respiratory complaints, diarrhea, fever, rheumatism, TB, bile problems and, interestingly, also jealousy. Studies of extracts of the leaves have shown protective activity against liver problems. |
| Mistletoe – hemiparasitic, male and female, photosynthesizes | Berries & browse; larval host plant for Great Purple Hairstreak Butterfly | Berries are toxic; tx for cattle hoof disease; proteins extracted have been shown to have a cytotoxic effect on breast cancer cells. |
| Honey mesquite – well adapted to drought (long taproot) | Food – nectar, pods, leaves; larval host for Reakirt’s Blue Butterfly, Long-tailed Skipper Butterfly; pods 30% sugar | medicinal for skin irritation, antacid, wound irrigation and preventive for bed wetting; Wood used for fuel, construction and making implements and weapons; charcoal and smoking food. Resin for glue and gum; livestock food. Flour from pods used to control blood sugar levels (diabetes) |
| Yucca (Spanish Dagger) | preferred nest site for the endangered Northern Aplomado Falcon; loggerhead shrike impales prey on leaf ends; larval host plant for the Yucca Giant-Skipper Butterfly; This yucca has an obligate mutualistic relationship with the Yucca Moth (*Tegeticula treculeanella*), which means that they both have an unavoidable requirement for the other in order to reproduce and live. The moth is the only pollinator of the flowers of the yucca, because the female moth has uniquely shaped, tentacle-like mouthparts which collect pollen in one flower and deposit it on the stigma of another; she also has a specialized, cutting organ to deposit her eggs directly into the ovary of the flowers. The yucca, in its turn, provides fertilized seeds, which are the only food the moth larvae can utilize to grow and develop. | Medicinal –laxative; flowers are edible; roots made into soap; leaf fibers made into rope |

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| Texas torchwood | Fruit, nectar, browse; | leaves have been investigated for potentially useful chemicals and have been found to contain anti-termite, anti-algal and anti-fungal activities; high oil content - used as torch |
| Colima (lime prickly-ash) | Fruit, nectar, browse; larval host for the Sicklewing Skipper Butterfly and the Giant Swallowtail Butterfly | Treatment of stomach ache, circulation problems, syphilis, and it is a stimulant and tonic. Powdered leaves and bark are used as a spice. It is used in tooth paste and powder for its refreshing taste. A yellow dye can be made from its wood. |
| Retama (means broom in Spanish) | Nectar, browse, seeds, cover; larval host for the uncommon butterfly Clench’s Greenstreak | traditional source of medicines used for treatment of stomach ache, epilepsy and fever, and is regarded as an abortifacient (causes abortions) and diaphoretic (producing perspiration). Extracts of aerial parts have been found effective in reducing fertility (in rats) and controlling diabetes. It is used for fuel, forage, erosion control, ornamental plantings and as a bee plant. |
| Texas porlieria (guayacan, soap bush) | Nectar, seeds, browse; larval host plant for two butterflies: Gray Hairstreak and Lyside or Guayacan Sulfur | Wood used for marine and machine bearings, pulleys, and fence posts. The bark of the root is used for soap, and because it doesn’t fade colors, is good for washing woolens. Livestock browse (18% protein) |
| Anacahuita (Mexican olive) | Cover, nectar, fruit – can be intoxicating | Leaves and other plant parts have been used medicinally to treat cold or flu-like symptoms and rheumatism; anti-microbial and anti-oxidant activity; ornamental |
| Non-native, invasive grasses (Johnson and buffel grass) – drought tolerant, can outcompete native plants | They are both noxious and / or invasive weeds in native communities. They provide some food for larger mammals, but are not very valuable for smaller wildlife species; the seeds are not frequently used by birds. | They were introduced as fodder crops for livestock. Both of these plants are drought and fire resistant, and in some growth stages show toxicity to livestock. However, they do produce palatable fodder for browsing and grazing animals. |