

Announcements

NEW EEB Students: We will be welcoming 10 students in the new EEB cohort this fall!

NEW EEB Executive Committee: On August 1st, Lee Fitzgerald takes over as EEB Chair, Heath Blackmon will be EEB Chair-Elect, and Anna Armitage will be EEB Curriculum Chair.

NEW EEBISO 2022-2023 Officers: Griffin Nicholson is the new President, Jorge Medina Duran is the new Treasurer, and Arani Cuevas-Sanchez is the new EEB Officer.

What's in Bloom? Photos and Descriptions by Kyle Simpson

The bluebonnets have long since faded, and the paintbrushes are on their way out, but in many ways, the blooms that decorate the roadsides of College Station are just getting started. In this newsletter, *Kyle Simpson from the Spalink plant systematics and biogeography lab* shares with us some of the species that can be seen flowering right now, both along the roadside and in more intact habitats.

Despite the relatively dry spring, *Coreopsis tinctoria* is putting on a show, coloring the medians and roadsides with golden yellow and dark red blooms. This species is a member of the sunflower family, Asteraceae. For those who might not know, the sunflower family is characterized by a very unique flower type called a composite. In this family, what many people think is a single flower is actually a complex arrangement of many individual flowers. This grouping of flowers, the inflorescence, is arranged with disk flowers at the center and ray flowers around the edges. The yellow "petals" of the coreopsis inflorescence are actually the modified petal structures of each ray flower.



Coreopsis tinctoria



Rudbeckia hirta

Coreopsis is not the only member of the sunflower family that can be found flowering right now. *Rudbeckia hirta* and *Ratibida columnifera* are two other aster species that can be seen flowering in open, grassy areas around College Station. In these species, the disk flowers are clustered into a column that is elevated above the ray flowers. This column of inconspicuous disk flowers gives *Ratibida columnifera* its common name, Mexican hat.



Ratibida columnifera

All three of these species are common on roadsides as well as native grassland communities, but many more species are more discriminant in their habitat requirements. If you drive along the backroads around College Station, you might occasionally encounter another member of the sunflower family: Engelmann's daisy (*Engelmannia peristenia*). This species was likely much more abundant historically when intact grassland communities were much more numerous, and while this species is certainly not the rarest plant in the area, it tends to be found only sporadically in higher quality habitats.



Engelmannia peristenia



Penstemon cobaea

Penstemon cobaea is one of the showiest plant species found in Texas grasslands and is flowering right now. It is just one of many *Penstemon* species that are native to Texas, all of which have very showy flowers, but *P. cobaea* takes the prize for the largest flower. This species is found in grasslands west of College Station and tends to prefer sites that are rockier with more exposed limestone.

While the bluebonnets and paintbrushes are beloved by many Texas (and rightfully so), the state, and College Station specifically, is host to many other species of plants that are worthy of admiration and appreciation. Be on the lookout for these species next time you drive down Highway 6 or spend a few hours driving the backroads looking for other botanic gems. If you fancy air-conditioning, you can see specimens of each of these species and many other species at the S.M. Tracy Herbarium.