

WHAT'S HAPPENIN' ON THE HILL
NATURAL HISTORY OF HAYS COUNTY
Beacon Hill, Buda, Texas
January 2021

HARBINGERS OF SPRING

Although the calendar still reminds us that it is winter, there are signs everywhere that spring is just around the corner. The days are getting longer, the temperature is slowly, but surely, nudging upwards, and the color of green is returning to the land. If you take a little closer look, you'll notice certain plants are setting forth with leaf and flower, as if to dare the late season frosts that are likely yet to come. Here are a couple of those Harbingers of Spring.

ELBOW BUSH, *Forestiera pubescens*, is a native deciduous, medium-sized shrub found throughout the Texas Hill Country. Its small leaves are opposite in arrangement along the arching branches, and indeed the mostly opposite twigs help render its common name.

Male and female flowers are born on separate plants and are attractive to bees, butterflies and other early season insects. Individual flowers are not showy, but the profusion of blooms found along the arching branches of this thicket forming shrub provides for a beautiful reminder that spring is on its way. Plant originally documented by English botanist Thomas Nuttall, who in 1819 witnessed Spanish Texas along the Red River.

Elbow Bush is a member of the Olive family (Oleaceae).



BIGROOT SPRINGPARSLEY, *Cymopterus macrorhizus*, is a native perennial that is rarely over one foot tall. In fact, there is much more to this plant than meets the eye, and it would stand to reason that its large taproot helps identify it as a member of the Carrot family. It is found sporadically through the Hill Country and Rolling Plains. The pink, purple or white flowers, along with the dissected leaves, sprout very early and have no main stem. Samuel Buckley, Texas State Geologist (1874-77), noted the winged fruit and used the Greek word Cymopterus when he named the plant. By summertime all signs of this plant disappear and the big root (see species name in Latin) begins its long wait for the following spring.

Springparsley is a member of the Carrot family (Apiaceae).



By Eric Beckers, Hays County Historical Commission
Natural Heritage Committee