

# WHAT'S HAPPENIN' ON THE HILL

## NATURAL HISTORY OF HAYS COUNTY

Beacon Hill, Texas

May 2022

### A RIOT OF COLOR

Late April rains on the hill have bumped the limited hues of early spring to a full array of contrasting colors. We are now treated to the whites of rain lilies and gaura, the reds of Indian blanket and coral honeysuckle, the yellows of cutleaf daisy and prickly pear cactus, the purples of Texas salvia and skullcap, and the oranges of paintbrush and lantana. These Hays County natives bring more bright colors to the landscape.

**FRAGRANT MIMOSA, *Mimosa borealis***, is a small to medium sized shrub found growing in rocky limestone soils from central to western Texas and into a few neighboring western states and Mexico. The sprawling 3-6' tall plant is covered in sharp recurved thorns that give credence to its nickname, catclaw mimosa. Indeed, if you get too close it will ask you to "wait a minute" until you can free yourself from the thorns. The beautiful pink blossoms make it well worth the risk of entanglement, as the flowers emit a delicious fragrance similar to the familiar exotic mimosa. The puffball-like blooms are an excellent source of nectar for butterflies, bees and other insects. This is a tough, drought tolerant plant that thrives in both hot and cold extremes. Fragrant mimosa blooms best in full sun and it should be planted more often in difficult locations where other plants have failed, or where barriers to human traffic are needed. More than a dozen other mimosas are found in Texas, including Nuttall's Sensitive Briar also found here on the hill.

aka pink mimosa is a member of the Pea family (Fabaceae)

**MEALY BLUE SAGE, *Salvia farinacea***, is a perennial herb found primarily in central and western Texas and into New and Old Mexico. The 2-3' plant grows in full sun from a woody root and is often encountered in dry limestone soils of prairie and savannah habitats. Like many plants in the Mint family, it has square stems, opposite leaves, tubular flowers and a pleasant fragrance. The blue to violet-blue flowers are arranged spike-like on top of a leafless stem that rises above the clusters of 1-3" linear leaves found below. The nectar produced by these showy flowers is eagerly sought by hummingbirds, butterflies and especially bumblebees. The common name for this hairy plant suggests the powdery blue appearance of some floral parts. This popular nursery plant was first described in the 1830s by the important English botanist George Bentham who named over 500 plants, many from outback Texas and Australia.

Mealy sage is a member of the Mint family (Lamiaceae)

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