

# WHAT'S HAPPENIN' ON THE HILL NATURAL HISTORY OF HAYS COUNTY

Beacon Hill, Buda, Texas  
September 2021

## A CHANGE IN THE AIR

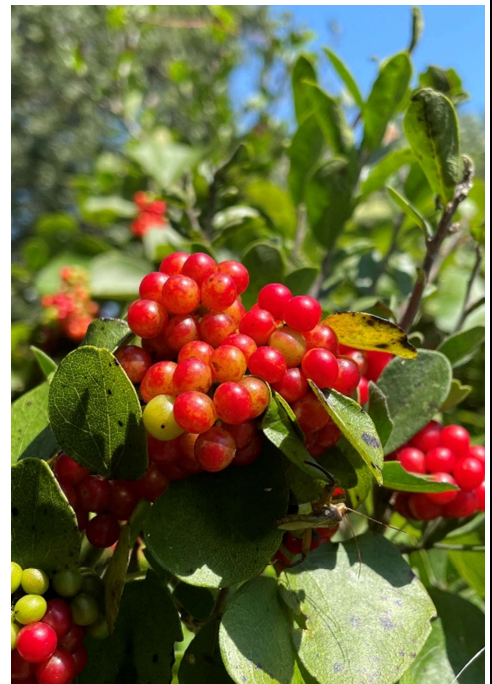
This summer was not as brutally hot as it's been in recent years, perhaps due in part to our well-timed rains that also kept things a bit greener than normal. Nonetheless, there are many of us who will be glad for summer's passing and we eagerly await the transition into cooler weather. September is often the time for that welcome change.

**INDIAN MALLOW, *Abutilon fruticosum***, is a perennial herb growing upright from 2-4' tall, and is found from Arkansas through much of Texas and into Mexico on sunny and dry locations. Surprisingly, it is also native to Africa, Arabia and India. This mallow is related to valuable commercial plants like cotton and okra, and ornamental plants like hollyhocks and hibiscus. The velvety heart-shaped leaves are grayish green, irregularly toothed and grow from 1-4" long. The yellow to orange blooms appear from spring through the fall and are up to 1" across. The seeds that develop are consumed by songbirds, quail and mourning doves. Deer and range animals will readily devour this plant to the point of depletion from the landscape. The foliage also hosts several species of skipper butterflies. French and Swiss botanists Jean Guillemin and George Perrottet documented the first specimens brought back to Europe from West Africa's present-day Senegal in the early 1830's.



Indian Mallow is a member of the Mallow family (Malvaceae)

**CAROLINA SNAILSEED, *Cocculus carolinus***, is a perennial climbing vine found from the southeastern US west to Illinois and on south through Texas into northern Mexico. This deciduous to semi-evergreen plant grows to 15' in sun to part shade, twining along fencerows and in open woods on trees and shrubs throughout Hays County. Its alternating leaves are oval to heart-shaped and from 1-4" long. The male and female flowers are found on separate plants, with female vines developing brilliant clusters of red fruit. These showy fruits develop in the summer and last into the fall providing birds a valuable food source. However, these fruits are not edible for humans as they contain toxic alkaloids. Snailseed's name comes from the coiled appearance of the dried fruit. If you look closely at the photo on the right, you might see a praying mantis feasting on a bug lunch. These beneficial predatory insects find shelter and concealment in settings such as this and help protect the host plant from destructive insects.



Carolina Snailseed is a member of the Moonseed family (Menispermaceae)

By Eric Beckers, Natural Heritage Committee  
Hays County Historical Commission