

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

Beacon Hill, Texas
December 2022

IT'S NOT THE END

The end of a growing season is taking shape here at Beacon Hill. A hard, killing freeze in the coming weeks will spell the end to annual plants that have already dropped seed for next year. Trees and shrubs have been dropping tired leaves, enriching the soil below. This is **not** the end, but rather a time for rest and rejuvenation, preparation for the next season of growth. These plants are also caught up in that Circle of Life.

ROUGHLEAF DOGWOOD, *Cornus drummondii*, is a shrub or small tree found growing from Central Texas to Alabama and northward across the Great Plains and up the Ohio River Valley all the way to Ontario. On the Edwards Plateau it grows on limestone soils along streams, hillsides and edges of woodlands. It's rough, oppositely arranged leaves are oval with parallel veins and smooth edges. This plant propagates by seed and root sprouts and is showy with springtime clusters of white flowers, and during autumn with vividly colored reddish leaves. The small, abundant white fruits are readily consumed by birds. The Latin *Cornu*, a horn, refers to the hardness of the wood. A related species was used for skewers by European butchers, with an old English name Dagwood used in reference to a dagger or sharp pointed object. Our plant was discovered by Scottish naturalist Thomas Drummond, who visited this area in the early 1830s.

Roughleaf Dogwood is a member of the Dogwood family (Cornaceae)



CEDAR ELM, *Ulmus crassifolia*, is a medium to large tree found from Mexico through central Texas and Oklahoma, and across the South to Mississippi and Florida. Across its native range it is found on a variety of sites, but in the Hill Country, it is most often found in woodlands on dry limestone soils occurring from hillsides to bottomlands. The small leaves have sawtooth edges and a surface that is rough to the touch, much like sandpaper. Fall color is often showy with yellows and oranges predominating. The tired leaves in photo at right, covered with tiny fungal leaf spots, will soon fall to enrich the soil below. It is the only native Texas elm to bloom and fruit in late summer and fall. This tree was 1st described by English naturalist Thomas Nuttall, who was a noted explorer of the American Southwest. His early 1800s observations of American Indians and settlers are important to historical archives.

aka Texas Elm and Olmo is a member of the Elm family (Ulmaceae)



By Eric Beckers, Natural Heritage Committee
Hays County Historical Commission