

Plant Conservation for Gardeners

from the Center for Plant Conservation



How Gardeners Can Help Save America's Vanishing Flora

Long before America became a nation of gardens, it was called a Garden of Eden, blessed with lush, unique native flora. Now, that natural bounty is about to slip through our fingers – but America's gardeners can help save it.

At the Center for Plant Conservation, we're working to conserve, preserve and restore our most vulnerable native plants. We need the collaboration of green thumbs around the country to make sure that all of our gardens – both planned and natural – can thrive.

What can gardeners do to help preserve America's vanishing flora?

Horticultural enthusiasts can help imperiled native flora in many ways! Botanical gardens and arboreta such as Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens and the 31 other institutions that participate in the CPC network often need volunteers to help store seed, monitor plants, locate hidden populations, transplant propagules, or care for seedlings in the greenhouse. Or, you could help in the office by recording data.

By becoming a friend of CPC, or by sponsoring a plant in our national collection, you can speed recovery efforts for our nation's most vulnerable plants and wildflowers. Of the 24 species maintained by Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens for the CPC's National Collection, most are in need of sponsorship. Visit Mercer's Endangered Species Garden to learn more about these plants, or visit Mercer's conservation Web pages at www.cp4.hctx.net/mercerc/conservation.htm. To learn more about endangered plants outside of East Texas, visit CPC's Web site at www.centerforplantconservation.org, or call (314) 577-9540 for more information.

Gardeners can also help by becoming more aware and spreading the word about the importance of saving our vanishing flora. Did you know that five percent of all native U.S. plants are federally listed as endangered, threatened, or a candidate for listing? Yet many people, including our leaders, know very little about the importance of native flora, and too little is allocated to fund native plant conservation. Our decision-makers need to know that you care about preserving the many benefits brought by native plants. Use your voice at the local or national level to share awareness of the plight of vulnerable native plants.

In your own garden, you can help by avoiding the introduction of invasive exotic species, which take over habitat and crowd out vulnerable natives.

Can Mercer or CPC send me seeds of imperiled plants?

Sorry, but no. Botanists throughout the CPC network of participating institutions collect and store seeds to hold in protective custody for our National Collection of Endangered Plants. Maintaining a complete, genetically representative sampling of seeds is vital to preserve restoration options for the future. Propagated plants are used by conservationists to restore populations of these valuable natural resources to the wild, and to recreate lost habitat. These seeds are needed for conservation work. Plus, distribution of endangered plants is regulated by law, although some nurseries may have permits to sell specific plants.



Houston Camphor Daisy
(*Rayjacksonia aurea*)

Photo by Suzanne Chapman

Is it okay to collect rare wildflowers?

Please do not collect seeds, roots, or other plant parts from imperiled, rare, or locally rare wildflowers or plants. It is illegal to disturb federally endangered plants on public land, and casual collecting can dramatically harm plants that are already at risk!

Instead, seek out plants that are lawfully propagated by a responsible nursery – or choose a close relative that is not imperiled for your home garden.

Can I help save endangered plants by growing them in my garden?

In most cases, unfortunately, no. The goal of plant conservation is to maintain the genetic resources of rare and at-risk plants in order to preserve options for restoration to the wild.

Genetic diversity is usually much greater in plant populations growing in the wild. Plants grown in gardens will experience different kinds of genetic shifts than those grown under wild conditions, because they won't experience the same interactions with soil, animals, weather, and other natural phenomena. Germinating and cultivating imperiled plants to maintain wild levels of diversity is carried out by trained conservation botanists under strict controls that cannot be duplicated in a backyard garden.

Garden versions of imperiled species might even alter the genetics of the wild population if they're close enough to be cross-pollinated!

On the other hand, a garden of native plants not facing risk of extinction can be a beautiful way to celebrate local natural heritage. See reverse for resources.

The National Collection of Endangered Plants

Some wild strains of native plants are closely related to the horticultural varieties that grace backyards and award-winning gardens. And some of these wildflowers are dwindling to dangerous scarcity. You can help ensure long-term care and security of these species by helping to sponsor a plant in CPC's National Collection of Endangered Plants.

The national collection is a bank of seeds, cuttings and other plant material from more than 600 of the country's most imperiled native plants. Botanists at CPC participating institutions gather

and catalog these plant materials according to strict standards developed by CPC's Science Advisory Council. The materials are then stored and maintained in protective custody at the participating institution, preserving our options for restoration. Generous donors help support the maintenance and research of plants in our collection.

Is there a relative of one of your garden favorites that needs sponsorship? Check Mercer's list of plants in need of sponsorship below, or browse the complete collection online at www.centerforplantconservation.org.

Plants In Need of Sponsorship at Mercer

- **Agave Family**

Glen Rose Yucca (*Yucca necopina*)

- **Buttercup Family**

Texas Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum texanum*)

- **Corkwood Family**

Corkwood (*Leitneria floridana*)

- **Gentian Family**

Texas Screwstem (*Bartonia texana*)

- **Grass Family**

Texas Windmill Grass (*Chloris texensis*)

- **Mallow Family**

Neches River rose-mallow (*Hibiscus dasycalyx*)

- **Mint Family**

Correll's False Dragon-head (*Physostegia correllii*), Long-sepal False Dragon-head (*Physostegia longisepala*)

- **Mustard Family**

Texas Golden Glade Cress (*Leavenworthia aurea* var *texana*)

- **Orchid Family**

Southern Lady's-slipper Orchid (*Cypripedium kentuckiense*)

- **Lily Family**

Texas Trillium (*Trillium texanum*)

- **Pink Family**

Scarlet Catchfly (*Silene subciliata*)

- **Quillwort Family**

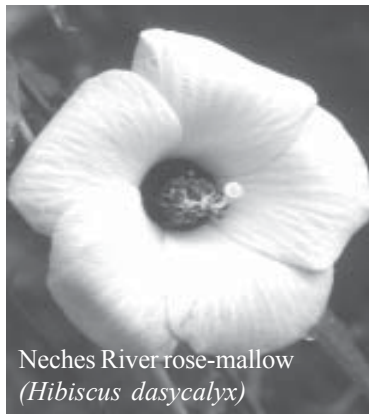
Louisiana Quillwort (*Isoetes louisianensis*)

- **Snapdragon or Figwort Family**

Navasota False Foxglove (*Agalinis navasotensis*)

- **Sunflower Family**

Bog Coneflower (*Rudbeckia scabrifolia*), Houston Camphor Daisy (*Rayjacksonia aurea*), Prairie Dawn (*Hymenoxys texana*), Rough-stemmed Aster (*Aster puniceus* var. *scabricaulis*), Slender Gay-feather (*Liatris tenuis*) White Fire-Wheel (*Gaillardia aestivalis* var. *winkleri*)



Neches River rose-mallow
(*Hibiscus dasycalyx*)

Photo by Greg Wieland

Resources...

- ◆ You can find native plant nurseries and seed suppliers, native plant organizations, and a database of native plants for every state, all at **The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's** website: www.wildflower.org

- ◆ Visit Mercer's Visitor Center and ask for a list of nurseries in the Houston area that stock native seeds and plants.

- ◆ Study the displays of native plants throughout Mercer especially those in the Endangered Species Garden. This garden is a certified Wildscape Demonstration Garden by Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and The National Wildlife Federation.

- ◆ Visit The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department at www.tpwd.state.tx.us and The National Wildlife Federation at www.nwf.org, to learn more about landscaping your yard with native plants and "wildscaping."

- ◆ Join Mercer as a volunteer and/or become a Master Gardener and learn first-hand how to raise native plants.

- ◆ Texas Parks & Wildlife, www.tpwd.state.tx.us, will train you how to conserve native plants as a Texas Master Naturalist.

- ◆ The Native Plant Society of Texas, www.npsot.org, holds regular talks, meetings, and outings as well as distributes a newsletter. It's a good way to meet other native plant enthusiasts, many of whom will be willing to share their expertise.

- ◆ Learn more about invasives. Visit the National Park Service's alien plant pages at www.nps.gov/plants/alien/index.htm. Examine voluntary codes of conduct from the "Linking Ecology and Horticulture to Prevent Plant Invasions" workshop at www.mobot.org/invasives.

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