

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: Dr. William M. Johnson

Bluebonnets are putting on spectacular floral displays nowadays. Although blue is the predominate flower color, bluebonnets with pink or white flowers also occur.



March 21, 2018



Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.

I received a call last week from a Friendswood resident. She was excited that she was finally able to establish a respectable bed of bluebonnets in her front yard. She was also mystified that several bluebonnets produced pink flowers!

"If the flowers are pink, are they still called blue-

bonnets?" she asked. The answer is yes, bluebonnets with pink flowers—or white flowers—are still called bluebonnets. I have seen both colors along the roadside while driving in the Brenham area.

Bluebonnets are starting to put on spectacular floral displays nowadays.

While the Brenham area may be acknowledged by many as the bluebonnet capital of central Texas, motorists need only to keep a watchful eye out here in Galveston County to view one of nature's majestic creations.

The lore, history and biology of our state's floral symbol are rather fasci-



nating.

Bluebonnets have been loved since humans first trod the vast Texas prairies. Indians wove fascinating folk tales around them. The early day Spanish priests gathered the seeds and grew them around missions. This practice gave rise to the myth that the padres had brought the plant from Spain, but this cannot be true since the two predominant species of bluebonnets are found growing naturally only in Texas—and no place else.

As historian Jack Maguire so aptly wrote, "It's not only the state flower but also a kind of floral trademark almost as well known to outsiders as cowboy boots and the Stetson hat." He also wrote that "The bluebonnet is to Texas what the shamrock is to Ireland, the cherry blossom to Japan, the lily to France, the rose to England and the tulip to Holland."

As our state flower, bluebonnets have an interesting history. Texas actually has five state flowers, more or less, and they are all bluebonnets. The five state flowers are all species classified within the genus *Lupinus*.

In the spring of 1901, the Texas Legislature got down to the serious business of selecting a state floral emblem. The ensuing battle was hot and heavy..

One legislator spoke emotionally in favor of the cotton boll since cotton was king in Texas in those days. Another legislator, a young

gentleman from Uvalde, so eloquently extolled the virtues of the cactus, noting the hardy durability of the plant and the orchid-like beauty of its flowers, that he earned the nickname "Cactus Jack." He was John Nance Garner and later became vice president during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration.

But the National Society of Colonial Dames of America in Texas won the day. Their choice of bluebonnets was *Lupinus subcarnosus* ("generally known as buffalo clover or bluebonnet," stated the resolution) and it was passed into law without any recorded opposition.

But some folks thought it was the least attractive of the Texas bluebonnets. They wanted *Lupinus texensis*, the showier, bolder bluebonnet that most folks nowadays associate as being our State flower. So, off and on for 70 years, the Legislature was encouraged to correct its oversight. But the now much-wiser-by-experience legislators weren't about to get caught in another botanical trap. Nor did they want to offend the supporters of *Lupinus subcarnosus*.

In 1971, the Legislature handled the dilemma by adding the two species together, plus "any other variety of bluebonnet not heretofore recorded," and lumped them all into one state flower as well. More than one member of our present-day

Legislature (as well as other law-making bodies across the nation) probably wish such a Solomon-like remedy exists for all politically-charged issues before them.

If you're interested in getting your own "backyard patch" of bluebonnets established, you can use either chemically scarified seed or bluebonnet transplants. Regardless of whether you use seeds or transplants, late October to November is the ideal time to get your own bluebonnet patch going in Galveston County. Once an area is established, and with a little care, such as not mowing them until after their seed pods have opened, you'll be treated to a yearly grand floral display in your own landscape.

At a glance

WHAT: Fig Tree Pruning and Propagation

WHEN: Thursday, March 22

TIME: 9:00 - 10:00 a.m.

TOPICS: Master Gardener Terry Cuclis will demonstrate how to prune fig trees and how to easily propagate figs from cuttings. He will share tips on growing a bountiful harvest of figs. Bring your gardening gloves and pruners for a hands-on learning experience.

WHERE: Galveston County Master Discovery Garden in Carbide Park in Carbide Park (4102 Main St. in La Marque). Pre-registration not required; for more information send an e-mail to galvcountymgs@gmail.com or phone 281-309-5065.

