

**Field Journal of Suzi Soroczak**  
**HRB 635C**  
**Prof. A. Pengelly**  
**Maryland University of Integrative Health**  
**Nov 2, 2018**

**Part I          Field Outings & Local Resources**

**Week of September 2, 2018**

**Out and about in my neighborhood: Spring Lakes in Spring, TX.**

*Callicarpa americana* aka Beautyberry



This plant has vibrant purple berries which are edible. [Click here for a link to a recipe for beautyberry jelly](#) . [Note: I have not made this jelly]. The leaves of the beautyberry plant are known for being a strong bug repellent. Most of the advice that I have seen suggested making a decoction of the leaves and stems. Or crushing the leaves directly on your skin to keep mosquitos away. I decided to try making an infused oil, so that I could add that to some bug repellent products that I am working on. I will let you know if repellent works well or not!

Note: the infused oil bug repellent did not work very well. I am going to harvest some more and try a decoction next.

*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* aka Hibiscus



The hibiscus plants in our area are on their third blooming cycle of the year. I made a first attempt at making hibiscus sun tea earlier this summer, but it didn't come out very good. I tried a second time this week and I was so happy that it came out! The key was making a decoction of the dried flowers first. Then I added more cold water, some stevia leaves, and the juice of a small lime. This might be last bloom cycle of the year for these plants, if so I will have to buy some dried flowers online.



### *Lagerstroemia indica* aka Crape Myrtle



Crape myrtle is all around my neighborhood. In fact my parents live on Myrtle Springs drive! I can see that there are a lot of species of this plant, and I have to do a little more digging on what species I can find around here. I don't know much about this herb, but according to Plants for a Future database the bark of the crape myrtle is a febrifuge, stimulant and styptic [Duke & Ayensu, 1985]. The bark, flowers and leaves are considered to be hydrogogue and a drastic purgative. A paste of the flowers is applied externally to cuts and wounds. The root is astringent, detoxicant and diuretic. A decoction of the flowers is used in the treatment of colds.

I will pick and dry some flowers to try this fall.

### References

**Duke. J. A. and Ayensu. E. S.** *Medicinal Plants of China* Reference Publications, Inc. 1985  
ISBN 0-917256-20-4

## Local Resources in the Houston, TX area

1. Houston Arboretum <https://houstonarboretum.org/> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.

I've already taken multiple classes here after I joined as a member.

2. Mercer Botanical Gardens <http://www.hcp4.net/community/parks/mercer> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.

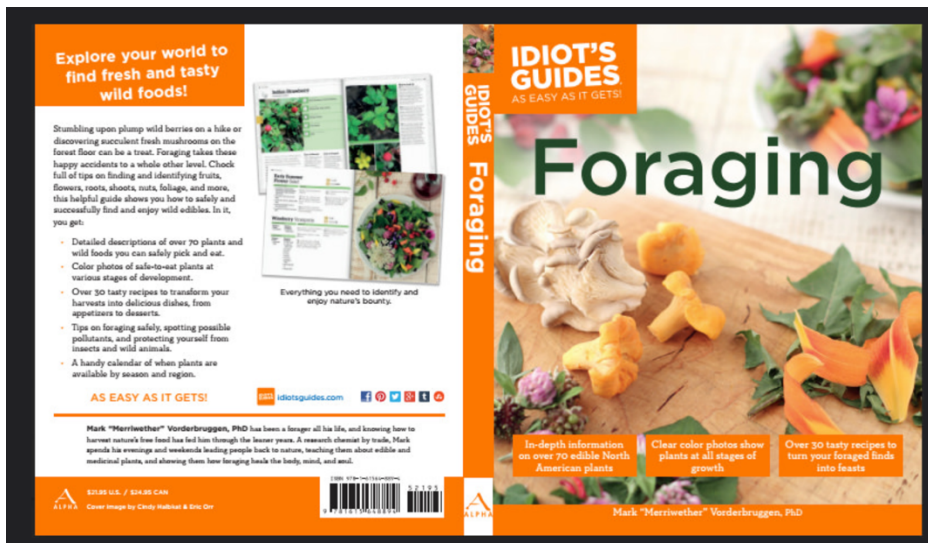
This park is v close to my parent's house. It has two halves: the east half is more like a nature preserve where you can take a dog and walk. Some of my favorite parts in this half are the Maple Collection, which has some wonderful trident maples (*Acer buergerianum*) and the Cypress Swamp (*Taxodium distichum*)!



The west half contains the botanical gardens and the botanical center. I'm planning to do my volunteer project here at the botanic center working on the herbarium. The entirety of this park flooded during hurricane Harvey, so the park is very much working on rebuilding some areas. [see photo of damage below]



3. This resource is a person! Merriwether Vorderbruggen is a local legend in the Texas foraging scene. He's a chemist by day and forager by night & weekends. I've taken two classes from him. He also works with the Houston Arboretum to offer educational programs. He's got a book and a website dedicated to local edible and medicinal fauna!



<http://www.foragingtexas.com/>

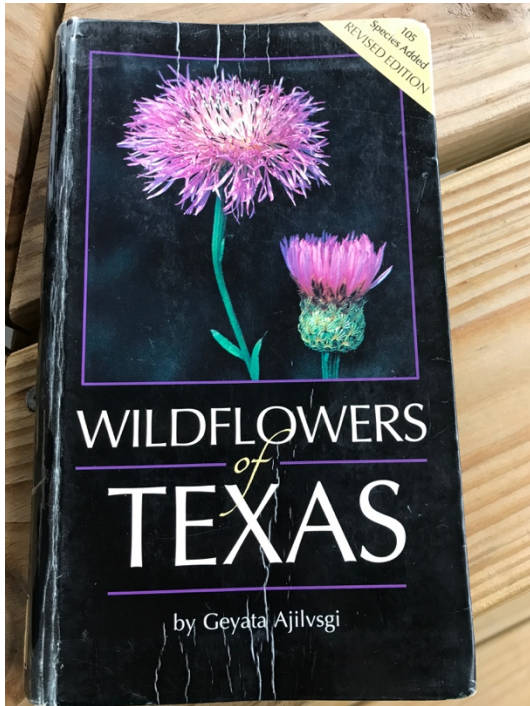
4. The Houston Botanical Garden is in the works! The city plans to open this garden to the public in 2020. You can see the plans here: <http://hbg.org/garden>

5. I found this article about other public gardens in the Houston area - which I will have to try an visit during my year in Texas. <https://www.houstoniamag.com/articles/2015/2/8/houstons-5-best-public-gardens-february-2015>

6. The Texas Native Plant Society is another great resource. It was through them that I met Lan Shen and took a guided identification walk at the Lawther-Deer Park Prairie.

7. The book I use most for plant identification is Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast (Pojar & MacKinnon, 2014). Obviously, it's not as very helpful now that I've moved to Texas. Below is

a title recommended by Merriwether for local identification. This book is organized by flower color so it's really easy to find flowers out in the field.



**Saturday September 1, 2018**

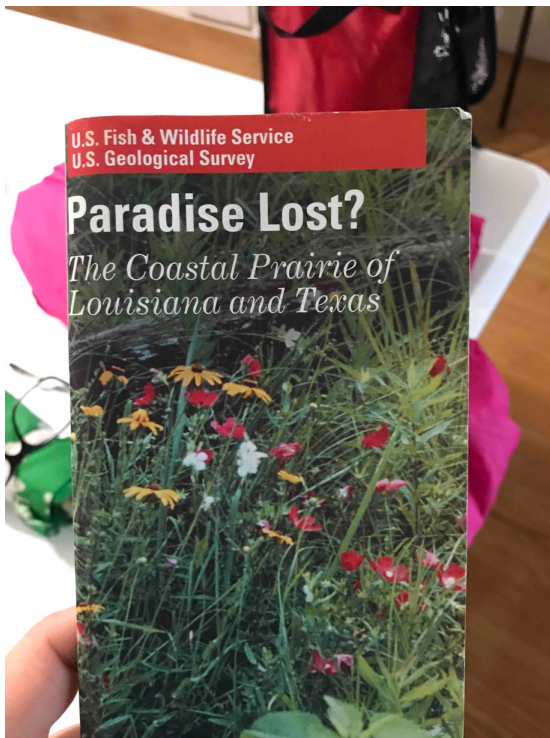
**9:00am – 1:00pm**

**Plant ID at Lawther-Deer Park Prairie with Lan Shen**

**Deer Park, TX**

Last Saturday I attended a seed collection and plant identification walk with the [Houston Native Prairie Association](#) (HNPA). Luckily our guide showed up and was able to take us out despite the downpour!

We visited the [Lawther-Deer Park Prairie Preserve](#) for our outing. This 51-acre land conservancy is smack-dab in the middle of a housing development and near a cemetery! Apparently, land near cemeteries and along side railroad tracks are often the best prairie remnants. This park is classified as a coastal prairie of Louisiana and Texas and contains a number grasses that you may recognize from the US midwest. There are also many prairie flowers growing in with the grass. Some of the wild flowers currently in bloom at Lawther-Deer Park were: swamp sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*), goldenrod (*Salidago canadensis*), and blanket flower (*Gaillardia estelaris*).



I know that grasses aren't particularly medicinal, but I learned a lot about identification of them. So that is what I'm sharing this week!

These Texas coastal prairie grasses are not suitable to cattle grazing, because if they are eaten down to the ground they will not grow back. This small preserve did not have cattle grazing so these stunning grasses are preserved. Most of the grasses that are growing in north and west Texas (ex., King Ranch grass) are non-native species that were brought in to sustain the cattle drives. This preserve is mowed once a year in the fall to promote growth, but was not mowed last year due to hurricane Harvey.

We looked at the season (late summer) and height of the grasses. We also looked at the color of the stems, size and shape of the seeds, and the shape of the seed head.

The top grasses that we saw at the park were:

Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*)

Has a blue tinged stem and was taller than the smaller variety, up to 6ft tall.



Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)

Usually 1-3 ft tall.



Gulf Muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*)

*A vibrant reddish color!*



and Love Grass (*Eragrostis curvula*)

This grass is so fine that it almost looks like fairy dust!






Below is a selfie of me fighting the rain with the prairie behind me. Another photo really shows off the Gulf Muhly as vibrant red patches.



Below is a list of the other plants that I identified on this walk.

Plant	Photo
Swamp sunflower ( <i>Helianthus angustifolius</i> )	

<p>Goldenrod (<i>Salidago canadensis</i>)</p>		
<p>Ragweed (<i>Ambrosia artemisiifolia</i>) Note: blooms as the same time as Goldenrod. This is what most people are allergic to, NOT the Goldenrod.</p>		
<p>Dewberry (<i>Rubus trivialis</i>) Note: this is a low growing black beery plant!</p>		

Maypop (*Passiflora incarnata*)



Peppervine (*Ampelopsis arborea* L. Koehne)



Blue sage (*Salvia azurea*)



Liatris sharp (*Liatris acidota*)  
And  
False chamomile (*Boltonia asteroides*)



Indian Blanket Flower (*Gaillardia pulchella*)



Snow on the prairie (*Euphorbia bicolor*)  
In the distance...



Wax Myrtle (*Morella cerifera* L.)  
Note; Leaves are often used as a  
cooking spice.



Elderberry (*Sambucas nigra*)





**October 20, 2018**

**8:30am – 12:30pm**

**Spear Survival Plant ID with Merriwether Vorderbruggen**

**Spring Creek Nature Center, Spring, TX**

I signed up for this class with Merriwether because I learned so much on previous classes with him. This location is very near my home! I picked 5 of my samples for my mini herbarium from this trip.

<b>Plant</b>	<b>Photo (if available)</b>
Japanese Hockweed ( <i>Crepis japonica</i> ) A great bitter edible.	
Pony's Foot ( <i>Dichondra carolinensis</i> ) Note: has a cleft in the petals unlike wood sorrel.	

Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis sp.*)  
Note: full round circle



Wireweed (*Sida rhombifolia*)



Persimmon Virginia (*Diospyros virginiana*)



Parsley Hawthorne (*Crataegus marshallii*)



Nutsedge (*Cyperaceae spp.*)  
The nuts found in the roots of this plant are so delicious!! I could eat these all day long.



Smartweed (*Polygonum hydropiper*)  
Has a sharp peppery taste



Marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*)



Greenbriar (*Smilax spp.*)  
The tender tips of the vine are edible.



Bay Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*)  
This smells so good!!!  
Used as a popular Cajun cooking spice.



Cat's Greenbriar






Sarsaparilla (*Smilax pumila*)  
Has mottled green leaves and grows on  
a vine like the briars. Dig up the root for  
medicinal value and traditional  
“rootbeer” taste.



Chanterelle mushrooms (*Cantharellus  
texensis*) the yellow ones  
And  
Chanterelle cinnabar (*Cantharellus  
cinnabarinus*) the bright orange one

Note: I collected a bunch and added  
them to pasta for dinner the next day.



<p>Turkey Tail mushroom (<i>Tratametes versicolor</i>)</p>		
<p>Reishi mushroom (<i>Ganoderma lucidum</i>) I'm currently in the process of double extraction this mushroom.</p>		
<p>Virginia Creeper A local adaptogenic plant!</p>		
<p>Beefsteak Weed (<i>Perilla frutescens</i>) This smells like exactly Thai cooking! I could definitely through some into my next bowl of pho.</p>	<p>N/A I couldn't find my photo of this plant. ☹️</p>	

Wild Violet (*Viola spp.*)

Note: I transplanted this one to my back yard.



Sassafras Tree (*Sassafras albidum*)

Note: I tried to get a photo of the 3 leaf shapes (mitten, 3 leaf point, and regular). Root can be harvested year around if trunk is 3" or larger.



Dwarf Palmetto (*Sabal minor*)

Note: the berries and heart have a lot of calories



Yupon Holly (*Ilex vomitoria*)

Note1: it does not have prickles on the leaves like the American Holly.

Note2: this is one of the only native American plants with caffeine. You can decoct the leaves for it!



## Part II My Volunteer Project

### Mercer Botanic Center Spring, TX

I'm doing my volunteer project at the [Mercer Botanical Gardens](#) ~ Botanic Center. My tasks are to help them add a new 50,000-specimen collection to the database. They were recently given the specimens on 30-year loan from the Houston School District which could no longer house the collection. Originally the Mercer Botanic Center had 5,000 specimens, so this is a huge increase!

My leader at Mercer Botanic Center is **Suzanne Chapman**. She trained me on how the specimens are stored, handled, repaired, and cataloged. **Anita Tiller** is the staff botanist and is available if we have any questions about specific plant identification and accepted naming conventions.

The specimens are being in an AC & humidity-controlled rooms on the upper level in steel cabinets. I have a cabinet that I am working on. I open each specimen folder and log the contents. If the item is need of repair, I can work another team to do that too.



Other projects at the MBC include creating signage for the botanical gardens, maintaining the library, working in the greenhouse, and updating maps of the gardens. They even have a gift shop that is open on Saturdays for the public.



#### **Part IV Statement on the Core Competencies**

Throughout this course I have endeavored to get to know my local parks and plant resources. I have taken classes at the Houston Arboretum, Spring Creek Nature Center, and Mercer Botanical Gardens. Taking a class from an expert was a great way for me to feel confident in plant identification as I am new to the area and the plants in Houston, Texas are very different from Seattle, WA. The classes have allowed me to meet people who led me to more people and events! For example, my volunteer work at the Mercer Botanical Center lead me to the Native Plant Society of Texas where I met Lan Shen at Lawther-Deer Park Prairie. Through my plant journal I have tried to highlight new species and some details about either identification and/or medicinal uses.

I feel that my hours spent both outside and inside working on the Herbarium at the MBC have helped me become better at plant identification, but also given me a greater understanding of stewardship and conservation. The Herbarium project has made me realize just how many plant species exist and how many have been lost to development, over harvesting, and climate change. Wherever my career takes me, I feel I that I will always work with local organizations to help maintain native plant resources whenever possible.