

useful wild plants, inc.

Update

Vol. 13, No. 1
Spring 2013

UWP news

WE BE OUT STANDING IN THE FIELD

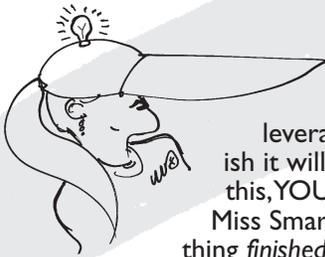
Not a bad thing to do for Earth Day, to go stand out in a field. And that's what we did on Earth Day 2013 (technically April 21, Earth Day Eve, but really, it's the only planet we've got right now, so isn't every day an earth day?). Anyway, Lucie Wray Todd of Houston and Columbus invited a slew of people to the Wray Ranch outside of Columbus for lunch and an opportunity to visit with people whose passionate particularities include plants, bats, cranes, birds (other than and in addition to cranes), wildlife, sustainable ranching, water, energy, law, food raising, local farming, and all-round sensible and satisfying living.

CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE DROLL

We eat a lot of chicken soup around here, or rather chicken tortilla soup. Los Pepes, just a few doors from UWP World HQ, makes a good one. And a lot of droll, witty, effervescent, comical, humorous, sprightly, wisecracking, interesting, concerned people come come by UWP World HQ and because we're not going to let an opportunity to pick people's brains for ideas about moving the Useful Wild Plants Project on to the next level, we often end up there because it's a good place to throw ideas around. In 2013 we have had sipped soup and kicked around ideas about furthering the Useful Wild Plants Project (and life in general, which around here amount to the same thing) with:

Kim Ludeke, manager of Texas Parks and Wildlife's GIS Lab, who stopped by to talk about resource mapping and pushing UWP on to the next level (an ever-present topic of conversation). And also unusual foods eaten in foreign lands.

Miss Smartyplants Sez...



that Scooter sez "When enough of the right people know about the Useful Wild Plants Project, the means to leverage the years of work and finish it will come." If you are reading this, YOU are one of the right people. Miss Smartyplants wants to see this thing *finished* so people can use it. Now go find another person and tell them about it. Bill Gates would be a good start...

Henry Wood, formerly of Cuero, Texas, (as is UWP president Scooter Cheatham) who shortly thereafter sent a 4 x 8' drawing of the Gunfight at the OK Corral Scooter had drawn in fifth grade when Bess Jernigan was his teacher. Bess was one of those teachers who encouraged creativity, research, and exploration in her students (and we can now see where that led...) Coincidentally, Mr. Jurnigan had been an attorney for agricultural chemist George Washington Carver, who led the way in showing the world the thousands of products to be developed in the plant kingdom.

Joe Holt and his wife Winnie. Joe was a student at the UT School of Architecture at the same time Scooter was. He had magnificent photographs from trips to Egypt, a few of

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Earth Day at the Wray Wranch near Columbus



Steve Speir, Kim Ludeke, and Scooter Cheatham and some Sopa de Pollo

Lynn Marshall

Lynn Marshall

GET A GRIP!

By Martin B. Payne

A dozen or so years ago Scooter Cheatham and Lynn Marshall of Useful Wild Plants, Inc. helped me identify and fall in love with a plant commonly known as lambsquarters (most common local species in Central Texas: *Chenopodium album*).

The tiny seeds from this native annual have been recovered from human coprolites from prehistoric cave dwellings and archeological sites. From the time it first appears in the spring until the first hard freeze, it prolifically produces edible leaves. And these leaves steam into greens that most people say taste better than spinach. Furthermore, *Chenopodium* greens are more nutritious than spinach. For nutrition details, see the *Chenopodium* entry in the upcoming Volume 4 of *The Useful Wild Plants of Texas, the Southeastern and Southwestern United States, the Southern Plains, and Northern Mexico*. Finally, the greens don't get bitter later in the year, not even when the plant produces its thousands of tiny seeds (which can be used for flour like those from its cousin, quinoa).

So, *Chenopodium* is a prolific producer of nutritious and tasty greens and tiny seeds. It is drought tolerant, as wild plants often are. And this plant even does its own genetic engineering - it (not unlike its relative the amaranth, *Amaranthus* species) has made itself glyphosate resistant in the Deep South (much to some farmers dismay). So yes, *C. album* is a truly power-plant.

"But wait. There's more!" as the infomercial announcer would say. Back when it rained, we grew

some really big *Chenopodiums*. I once had a nine foot *Chenopodium* in my garden, and Scooter had one that went fifteen feet. *Chenopodiums* such as these develop a large diameter stalk or stem — like over an inch. I was really surprised, though, that when we pulled these plants out in the winter we found a very woody stem material that was hard to the center rather than having a pith core like many other annual "weeds."

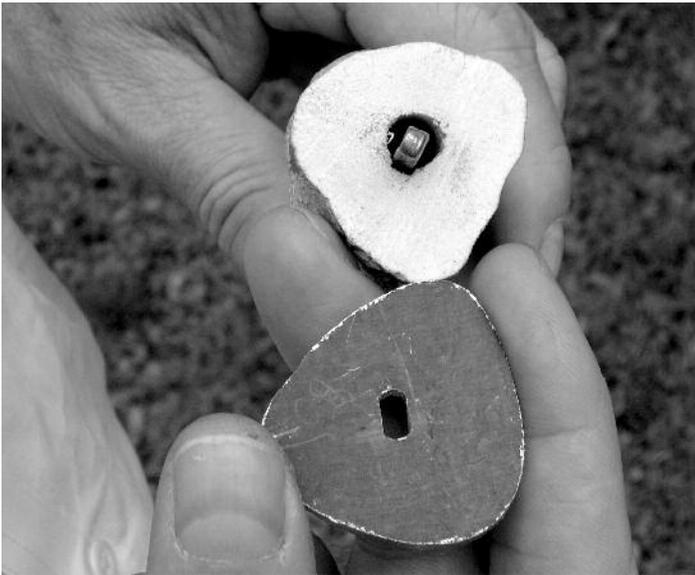
As a guy who likes to work with metal and some wood, I couldn't just toss that wonderful, relatively hard, fine-grained, unique stem into the compost pile. So, what to do with it? Well, I'm also a "knife nut," and have made a few blades of my own. Why not use a piece of *Chenopodium* stem for a knife handle? So that is what I did ...

Shown below is a Swedish laminated factory blade to which I fastened a *Chenopodium album* handle. This wood is surprisingly hard (a fingernail won't dent it) and more dense than you would expect (it's not like Balsa wood.) It is fine-grained and it can be cut with a fine-toothed saw, filed and rasped. In the handle illustrated, I left the bark on to add character.

So, this wasn't my first experience with making a knife handle out of unique plant materials, nor my last. Back in the '90s I had a jalapeño plant that overwintered and whose stem grew to about ¾ inch in diameter. Technically the jalapeño is a cultivar of the wild bird pepper *Capsicum annuum* var. *glabriusculum*. Anyway, the "wood" from this jalapeño was even harder than that of the *Chenopodium* and was cut and



Blade with threaded tang, brass bolsters, *Chenopodium album* (lambsquarters) handle, and a nut to hold it all together



Scooter Cheatham

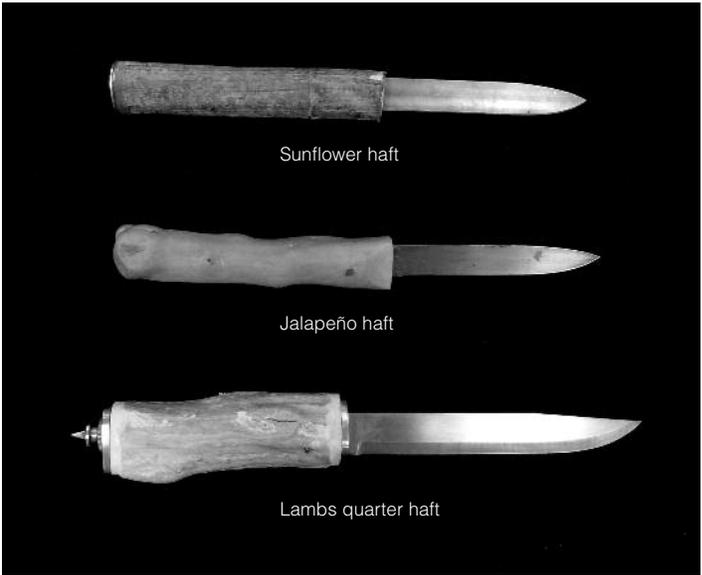
Completed bolster ready to fit to *Chenopodium* handle

sanded to a nice finish. A pepper plant stem, who woulda thought?

A while later I wound up with a giant sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) that had a stalk almost an inch in diameter. With those other weird, woody annuals working like they did ... well, you guessed it.

Other ideas? Well, another of my hobbies is biomass gasification. In Europe they are coppicing willow (*Salix* species) to grow and harvest for shoots for biomass. I'm thinking *C. album* might be a nice biomass and biochar plant! Clearly, *Chenopodium* is one of many useful wild plants and is a good example of why we need to accelerate the funding and completion of the Useful Wild Plants Project!

Martin Payne is an oil man, raiser of grass-fed beef, Weedfeeder, Boy Scout leader, and member of UWP's Board of Trustees.



Scooter Cheatham

Finished knives by Martin Payne

Chicken Soup for the Droll continued from page 1 which contained Egyptian plants (believe it or not, there is botanical overlap between Egypt and Texas) so it isn't as tangential to UWP as it might seem. Besides, I (Lynn) was a Tut Nut when I was a kid, which led to archeology, and the foot bone eventually being connected to the head bone, this led to a job at Texas Memorial Museum, which led to Scooter's Weedfeed class, which led to UWP, and that's all she wrote...

Daniel Atha, who is a multi-Weedfeed alum who moved to New York City (New York CITY! as the salsa ad cowboy would say) to work in botany at the New York Botanical Garden.

Richard Worthington, recently retired from UT El Paso, brought books for UWP's botanical collections and stamps for my mother (and long-time UWP supporter and volunteer) Jane Marshall; her DAR chapter collects stamps for veterans programs. Richard was in Austin with his wife

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Scooter Cheatham

Chenopodium handle capped with bolster and nut.

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Chicken Soup for the Droll continued from page 3

Pat, who as curator of the El Paso County Historical Society was in Austin for the annual meeting of the Southwest Association of Archivists.

With Volume 4 of *Useful Wild Plants...* on the horizon it is time once again to brainstorm ways to move this project along and get it finished. It is a monumental project, but as long as too few people are working on something that requires a dozen or more good minds, it can't go very fast. **Got some ideas about how to do that? Come over for a bowl of soup and let's talk. Be a part of the UWP Chicken Soup Group.**

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UWP's Mission

To promote the understanding, appreciation, stewardship, and sustainable use of wild plants through programs of conservation, education, research, publication, and entrepreneurship.

Focus

To create and maintain a comprehensive knowledge and information base, a platform from which to launch further research on native plants. This vast body of knowledge will be of service to scientists, horticulturists, ecologists, teachers, park rangers, hobbyists, and others, and ultimately will be accessible in several forms, including the multi-volume encyclopedia, an interactive database, CD-ROM, and films. This is the most complete economic botany work produced for any region in the world.

Projects and Programs

- *The Useful Wild Plants of Texas, the Southeastern and Southwestern United States, the Southern Plains, and Northern Mexico*, a multi-volume work
- The Alluse Database
- Independent Studies with UWP
- The "Save the Human Libraries" project to preserve vanishing knowledge through video- and audio-taped interviews
- "Landmark Landscapers" project to interview horticulturists and naturalists who are bringing the best of the natives to the market for use in landscaping
- "Plug Into Your Planet," to help students evaluate their impact on the planet through their choice of possessions

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