

useful wild plants, inc.

Update

Vol. 12, No. 3
Fall Over 2012

UWP news

UWP GOINGS ON

Volunteer proofreaders Jo Overton and Linda Anderson dropped off a stack of Volume 4 manuscript. They said the text was pretty clean. I can tell we're getting there when readers apologize for not finding enough mistakes.

UWP also had a great time at this year's Texas Book Festival, thanks to Sheryl Cheatham, John Flowers, Steve Speir, Arthur Turner, Stan Roux, Johnny Atkinson, Wendy Matthews, Steve Oldroyd, Rachel Hagan, Joanna Fernandes, Madeleine Villatoro, Harry Meilink, Kathy Lansford-Powell, West Garrett, Shiveta Shruastav, and Eugenia Stefan. Thank you all! In October we (Scooter and Lynn) sold native trees at the Garden Club of Houston's 70th annual Bulb and Plant Mart (Scooter sold a record eight trees to one guy).

We have updated the UWP database, so if you've been getting extra Updates or no copies and you are a member, we're hoping to have gotten it fixed. Database housekeeping hadn't been done in several years and the thing was getting kind of scruffy.

As to getting into the field, we did a Speedy Weedfeed and a condensed field class for Dr. Stan Roux's Signature Course at UT Austin. But others in the UWP family have been doing some serious traveling. Marvin Watson, son of the late Geraldine Watson, Volume 3 dedicatee and Big Thicket authority, has developed a connection with plant researchers in Botswana and Uganda and has long-range plans for economic botany research in Texas and Africa. His thoughts follow.

MARVIN WATSON OUT OF TEXAS AND INTO AFRICA

As I walked through the rainforest of Uganda, I marveled at the diversity. I could feel my mother's presence as she preached about the hand of God being most evident in our botanical world. I stood in the midst of creation itself. Birds flitting, bugs tumbling, ants marching, the sound of *Orchis* riding the wind in the canopy. I stayed on the northern shore of Lake Victoria. For a few dollars a day I purchased fruits and melons for my meals, and there are not words to describe how succulent and sweet everything tasted. The eggs came out of the yard and the bread was hand made daily. Africa was supposed to be this dark, forbidding Third World place, but everything I experienced was a season to turn, every step in the jungle a moment in Paradise.

I found that rural people know the local plants of their areas but are not always familiar with plants from other parts of the country. Local species are valuable in the diet, especially where green leaves are required to provide adequate vitamin A or where the protein supply is low. In general, it is the women who look after the home gardens of food crops, fruits, and a few medicinal herbs. These women of Africa showed me how simple life can be and took great joy in living.

My trip had me in Uganda for a reason. Uganda has some of the most sought after medicinal plants on the planet, and in 1991 the Nakawa Research Center in Kampala undertook ethnobotanical and floristic research that resulted in a pilot study including medicinal plants, which has become my targeted botanical interest as I myself come full circle and walk in familiar footsteps again.



Marvin Ellis Watson



Botswana dwelling

Scooter Cheatham

Marvin Watson

FOR ALL OF YOU
ASKING THE QUESTION
"WHAT WILL BE IN VOLUME 4?"
WE BRING YOU...

ABRIDGED TOO FAR

Volume 4 in a nutshell as we march through the Cs, with apologies to the 1977 film of a similar title

Botanists, for some reason lost in the mists of time, love the letter C. It beats out all other letters for starting genus names, including P and S, for which there are many but still fewer than C, at least on the list of 900+ genera being worked here at the Useful Wild Plants Project. Volume 4, which follows volumes 1, 2, and 3 and precedes volumes 5, 6, 7, etc. will run around 600 pages and will include one to 50 or so pages of photographs, descriptions, and use information on each of the following plants. Please note, what follows is roughly 0.0001% of the information you will have at your fingertips when you acquire your own copy of Volume 4 of *The Useful Wild Plants of Texas, the Southeastern and Southwestern United States, the Southern Plains, and Northern Mexico*.

Cenchrus (grassbur) — Find out why grassbur isn't so bad! Don't let its spiny shell defeat your feet! Bite it first before it can sprout — ancient native peoples ate the seeds, believe it or not, as Mr. Ripley would say. *Centaurea* (centaury) — Neanderthal people buried their dead with the flowers. *Centaureum* — Navaho Windway plant and just downright pretty, like non-melting snowcones along the Hill Country roadsides. *Centella* (spadeleaf) — A memory aid in India, if memory serves, and a plant with medicinal applications too numerous to enumerate here. *Centrosema* (butterfly pea) — A hair wash and a basket plant and a downright pretty vine. *Cephalanthus* (buttonbush) Good for boggy landscapes and for dysentery. *Cerastium* (mouse ear) — A potherb and a wound glue. *Ceratophyllum* (hornwort) — An invasive aquarium plant banned in Tasmania! *Ceratopteris* (water sprite) — Philippine salad plant and aquarium foliage. *Cercidium* (paloverde) — Prehistoric food and an otherworldly green-barked landscape tree. *Cercis* (redbud) — tasty pink flowers in spring on a beautiful small tree, excellent wood for tools. *Cercocarpus* (mountain mahogany) — Tools, fire sticks, nitrogen fixer in difficult soils. *Cestrum* (jessamine) — A pretty climbing vine used to treat dyspepsia and fungi. *Cevallia* (stinging serpent) — Quite pretty in its place but it has some pretty serious stinging hairs that most people try to avoid, but that didn't stop late 80s suburban developers from naming a suburban street after it in Odessa, Texas. *Chaerophyllum* (wild chervil) — Salad green and herbs for flavoring. *Chaetopappa* (least daisy) — It may be small, but its tiny flowers are like a shower of stars. *Chamaecrista* (partridge pea) — Nitrogen fixer and major quail food, for all you hunters out there. *Chamaesaracha* (false nightshade) — Contains anticancer pyrrolidines. *Chaptalia* (silver puff) — Pretty and kills *E. coli* to boot. *Chasmanthium* (inland sea oats) — Good seeds make tasty crackers. *Cheilanthes* (lipfern) — Apache beverage but some species cause "the jimmies." *Chenopodium* (lambsquarters) — The granddaddy of wild greens and probably the longest treatment in Vol. 4. *Chilopsis* (desert willow) — Versatile landscape tree and much used medicinal in the southwestern states. *Chiococca* (David's milkberry) — Astringent, and soaked in rum it was used to treat drinking problems. But nobody seems to know who "David" is. *Chionanthus* (fringe tree) — A small frilly-flowered tree that has been used to treat skin inflammation and cirrhosis, among other things. *Chloris* (windmill grass) — Livestock forage, pinole, and for those whose sense of whimsy runs to the botanical, the seed heads are fun to twirl around. *Choisya* (starleaf) — Odd landscape shrub with citrus-scented flowers. Deer are said not to eat it. *Chorispora* (blue mustard) — Russian salad plant and a serious invasive pest that taints milk. *Chrysactinia* (damiana) — Shhhh. It's reputed to be an aphrodisiac. So that's why everybody is planting it... *Chrysanthemum* (ox-eye daisy) — Luminous white flowers nice in the starlight garden; not a native but sometimes wrongly sold as such. *Chrysopsis* (golden aster) — An under-used landscape plant that the Oklahoma Delaware used to treat colic. *Chrysothamnus* (rabbit brush) — Used to treat nightmares and to weave baskets in the Southwest. Also a good dye and the plant yields latex. *Cichorium* (chicory) — Think Café du Monde and that special New Orleans coffee. *Ciclospermum* (fir-leaved celery) — A salad additive that is also active against *Staphylococcus aureus*. *Cicuta* (water hemlock) — Only one of the most virulently toxic plants around. *Cinna* (stout woodreed) — A nice native landscape grass. *Cinnamomum* — Camphor? In Texas? Yep. Not native but it seems to be quite happy in Houston. *Cirsium* (thistle) — Quite useful, once you get through its spiny defenses. *Cissus* (cow-itch vine) — Birds love this ornamental vine, which was also used as a medicinal poultice. *Citharexylum* (fiddlewood) — Its screaming orange fruits are quite ornamental. *Citrullus* (watermelon) — Thump! This is what you get when people spit all those seeds out at the beach. *Citrus* (sour orange) — Makes a great not-your-mother's-lemon-meringue-pie. *Cladium* (Everglades sawgrass) — Dramatic pond plant with edible leaf bases. *Claytonia* (spring beauty) — Elf flowers cover the ground above edible corms eaten by Native Americans. *Clematis* (leatherflower) — A tough name for one of the loveliest of vines, and it's where Santa's elves come from too. *Cleome* (spiderflower) — A potherb and a pottery paint all rolled into one. *Cleomella* (rhombopod) — A remarkable bee plant. *Clerodendrum* (Kashmir bouquet) — An old southern landscape plant now naturalized whose roots when soaked in wine were used to treat all sorts of ailments in China. *Clethra* (sweet pepperbush) — Has highly scented flowers and nicely colored fall foliage, which has been used for tanning leather. *Clitoria* (butterfly pea) — Hef's favorite native vine. *Cnidioscolus* (bull nettle) — Stinging hairs will jab the noses of those who get too close while smelling the tuberoscented flowers. *Coccinea* (ivy gourd) — Malaysian potherb served with rice and a fruit that is candied and pickled in India and Java. *Cocculus* (scarlet moonseed) — Quite ornamental in the right setting, it can glow with the best of the red-and-green holiday plants. Birds eat the red fruits, but people should not. *Collinsia* (blue-eyed Mary) — A Natchez remedy for consumption that kills gram positive bacteria and flowers in lovely drifts in the spring. *Colocasia* (taro) — One of the world's major foods. *Cologetia* (cologetia) — A pretty little thing whose leaves are much beloved by the larvae of the *Drusium* Cloudywing butterfly of the southwest. *Colubrina* (snakewood) — A tough small shrub whose leaves not only are browsed by wild javalina but contain maytanisoid compounds studied for cancer treatment. *Comandra* (bastard toadflax) — A hemiparasite on native oaks, it is also a street name (with an additional "m") near Cevallia in Odessa. *Commelina* (widow's tears) — A sight for sore eyes. *Commelinantia* — Why is Yosemite Sam in my salad? *Commnicarpus* (climbing wartclub) — A friendly vine whose warty club-shaped fruits will do their best to catch a ride on a passersby's clothes. *Condalia* (brasil) -- A delectable wild fruit (with the exception of the bitter *C. spathulata*), the seeds of which are found in archeological sites, indicating that early peoples also considered them to be too. *Conium* (poison hemlock) — Condemned to be executed with poison hemlock for corrupting the minds of Athenian youth, Socrates downed a potion of it, leaving the field of philosophy wide open to Plato. Caterpillars of the swallowtail butterfly, however, eat it with impunity and care not one whit about ancient Greece. *Consolida* (larkspur) — The fact that it contains some impertinently poisonous alkaloids has not kept it from being used for medicinal purposes in Europe and Central America and by Native Americans. It's not a native but is awfully pretty and is sometimes included in "native" wildflower mixes. *Convolvulus* (bindweed) — A toxic plant and flavorant for alcoholic beverages. What are people thinking? The flowers are pretty, but if it gets a toehold in the garden there'll be heck to pay trying to get it out. *Conyza* (horseweed) — An Asian vegetable, a flavoring for soft drinks, and a treatment in Mexico for intestinal disorders. *Cooperia* (rain lily) — A lovely little bulb that seems to spring from nowhere shortly after a rain.

That was, as the captain of the Titanic might have said had he been paying attention, the tip of the iceberg. Notice that where Volume 3 had fewer genera but some really long ones, Volume 4 has more genera but just one really long one and several lethal ones. For information about the Sponsor a Species opportunities for Volume 4 plants call 512.928.4441 or email info@usefulwildplants.org.

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

Bill Carr, Top-Notch Botanist, Acme Botanical Services

The following missive was sent to UWP by crack field botanist William R. Carr regarding a recently discovered property of *Cuscuta exaltata*. This plant preys shamelessly on other plants. It wraps itself around them, infiltrates their inner being, drains their life force, and uses them up with no regard to their fate. It also goes by the names "dodder," "devil's gut," "hellbine," "witches hair," "what's that stringy yellow stuff that looks like spaghetti?," and "get off the couch and go get a job."

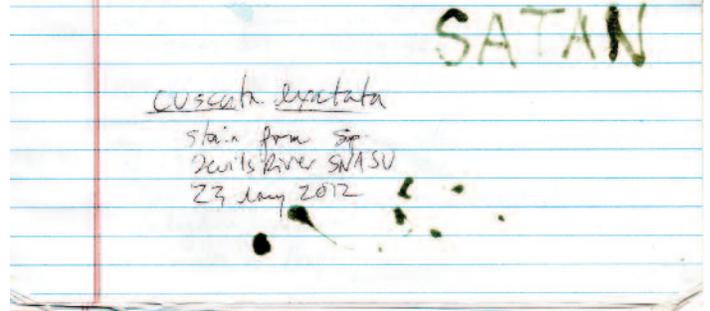
While working on the continuing plant inventory of the not-yet-open-to-the-public new addition to TPWD's Devil's River State Natural Area this morning [May 23, 2012], I encountered a population of *Cuscuta exaltata* having its way with the twigs of woody plants, as it is wont to do. This time the victims were young *Celtis reticulata* and *Quercus pungens* var. *vaseyana* growing on a limestone ledge not far from the bank of the river that lends its name to the park and just a stone's throw from the mouth of Little Satan Canyon. I clipped a specimen that I hoped to simply stuff into a plastic bag for the half an hour or so that might transpire before I returned to a real plant press, but the specimen put up quite a fight. I was not aware that this dodder can bleed like a stuck pig when it wants to, and in no time there were drops of vaguely sticky but by no means viscous sap on my clippers, the plastic bag, my notebook, and various body parts. I did begin to worry about those body parts after I noticed that what dripped out as a clear liquid changed to a yellow-pine green after drying for a few seconds on the cheap lined tablet paper that I use in my field notebook. I flipped a page, cut a new *Cuscuta* twig, and used it to

write SATAN in block letters two lines (an inch) high, kind of like we did in first grade. Okay, maybe you went to a school where they made you write JESUS. I simply chose the word SATAN in celebration of the venue.

Anyway that was at about 11:30 this morning, and the word is still plainly visible now, some six hours later. I don't know whether *Cuscuta exaltata* always behaves this way. This area got a mess of rain (seven inches) about two weeks ago, and maybe that had something to do with its being pumped up. If the test paper is of interest, I'll send it to you when I get back. Unless of course my hand dehiscence tonight due to contact with the Devil's Sap.

Cheers,

Bill



CONFUSION SAY...



Or as Miss Smartyplants, UWP's resident philosopher, says "Sloppy spelling hazardous to health!" She has been seeing the brown spindle-shaped yuca root wrongly labeled "yuca" at produce counters about town. They are not the same thing and that label should not give one the idea that one could go out

and harvest the roots from the native (or naturalized) yuca plant to save money for dinner, because, ladies and gentlemen, that would be unwise and could be dangerous. So before anyone does something untoward, like eating something they shouldn't, she is going to set things straight.

The problem stems from the similarity in the words "yuca" and "yucca." Miss Smartyplants will point out the obvious — "yuca" has one c and "yucca" has two. Yuca is *Manihot esculenta* (manioc, tapioca comes from it). Yucca is a common and botanical name of plants of the genus *Yucca* (Spanish dagger, twistleaf yucca). The root of the yuca (*M. esculenta*) is edible. The root of the yucca (*Yucca* species) is not edible. It is fibrous and contains saponins. It can be pounded and used as a scrubby washing thing that comes complete with its own soap. Miss Smartyplants has heard of people extrapolating (a dangerous practice) from the misspelling, digging up the roots of the yucca, and baking them. Miss Smartyplants reminds you to Know Your Plants!



Yuca (*Manihot*) root properly labeled at Central Market



Manihot esculenta (yuca)



Yucca treculeana (yuca)

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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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