All official events are still cancelled by the State Board

Using Dead Trees

The oak wilt that has devastated the hill country has not spared my place. The trees that were already dead when I bought this acreage, were cut down and became part of the berm system along my north fence. As years have gone by, more trees have succumbed and are now standing dead.

Wood-peckers chisel out holes in these trees and birds, squirrels, ring-tails and others nest in them, so I want to leave them for the wild life. But they give a certain gloomy, ‘witches forest’ look to the area, that I don’t like.

My new solution was inspired in France a few years ago. We were there in the fall and I was enamored with the fabulous Virginia creeper that painted so many of the buildings a gorgeous red color. Not having an appropriate wall for it, I didn’t try to replicate the effect. But this spring, I planted two small starts (gifted to me by Kathy Lyles) at the base of a dead oak tree. Hopefully, they will grow to clothe the tree in dense, green leaves in the summer and glowing, red leaves in autumn. This is such a good idea that I plan to try it on other trees with other vines even though it will be a few years before I know if it worked.
This photo is of one of many French buildings we saw that were covered with Virginia Creeper. Is that fabulous, or what?! Surely it will look just as lovely covering and hanging from a dead oak tree.
Rock Rose (Rose Pavonia)

This vibrant little rock rose is not really a rose. Since it isn’t, it isn’t nearly as much trouble as a real rose and it requires no pruning or spraying. It is small, woody shrub that only lives 2-4 years but reseeds easily. Look closely at the photo and you will see the dead flowers with their four little tan seeds inside. I’ve never found their reseeding to be a problem. They are easily pulled up and can be transplanted or potted for a friend. As the seeds sprout, the plants seem to move around and pop up in various places. I usually just leave them alone. Small spreading plants and bulbs will come up thru the open branches. In high humidity (or if you still water with sprinklers) they will sometimes get white mildew. But I never treat them and it goes away of its own accord.

I’ve had luck collecting and tossing the seeds on my north fence berms where they get no more attention from me. They like full sun and are quite hardy, like most of our natives.
Below is a very good article by Cindy Anderson about Muhly grass. It was published a few months ago but I want to be sure that everyone sees it, so here it is again.

LINDHEIMER MUHLY. By Cindy Anderson

Lindheimer muhly (often called just “Muhly grass” or “Big muhly”) – is a native ornamental clumping grass, very popular in Central Texas landscapes. Its upright form makes it a good choice for a variety of landscape design uses, as either a background plant or as a centerpiece. Its narrow blue-green leaves and feathery, swaying seed heads make a very striking form, softening our landscapes and providing interest when many other plants are dormant.

More and more, both residential and commercial landscapes are including native grasses. Why? Because they are not browsed by white-tail deer and, once established, require little water and no fertilizer. Also, their deep roots provide excellent erosion control. They can be utilized as screens, or planted in a row to set off a particular area or a property line. The plumes of flowers are also impressive in fresh or dried cut-flower arrangements.

Growing 3- to 5-feet tall and wide, Lindheimer muhly produces flower stalks that extend an additional foot above the foliage. It adapts to soils with a wide range of pH and textures, but does need reasonable drainage. It performs best in full sun, but will tolerate light shade. Once established, it has outstanding drought tolerance that makes it an excellent native substitute for Pampas grass or Chinese/Japanese silvergrass – foreign plants which grow aggressively, disperse seeds freely, crowd out native plants, and create fire hazards. One additional advantage: this big grass won’t cut you to shreds like Pampas grass will – its leaves are much softer.

Lindheimer muhly was named in honor of Ferdinand Lindheimer, the “Father of Texas Botany.” Many other plants native to the Texas Hill Country also bear the name “Lindheimer” or “Lindheimer’s.” Most of these plants were first collected by Lindheimer, who settled on the banks of the Comal River in New
Braunfels in 1845. His charming home, now known as The Lindheimer House, is currently owned and run as a museum by the New Braunfels Conservation Society, and is a delightful place to visit when touring the area.

Its genus name, *Muhlenbergia*, comes from an earlier German settler. Gotthilf Hunrich Ernst Muhlenberg lived from 1753 to 1815. He was born into a prominent Pennsylvania family, and his father and brothers were influential patriots during the Revolutionary War. Because of his family’s involvement in the Revolution, Muhlenberg was on the British hit list.

While he was hiding out in a rural area away from Philadelphia during the Revolution, Muhlenberg became interested in botany. Through his extensive collections, Muhlenberg made major contributions to botany, and many plants have been named in his honor. For example, among our local flora are several species of muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia*) and Chinquapin oak (*Quercus muhlenbergii*). Two other popular muhly grasses for landscaping are Gulf muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaries*), a smaller bunchgrass with a pink glow to its flower plumes, and Bamboo muhly (*Muhlenbergiadumosa*), with fern-like leaves and a fluffy, lacy texture.

Because this drought-tolerant species has been shown to perform outstandingly across a wide spectrum of climates and soils, making it well suited across Texas and beyond – it was recently awarded the status of a Texas Superstar. Texas A&M AgriLife created the Texas Superstar plants program to help Texans select the best plants for quality and reliability. To be designated a Texas Superstar, a plant must not only be beautiful, but perform well for consumers and growers throughout the state. Texas Superstars must be easy to propagate, which should ensure the plants are not only widely available but also reasonably priced.

A very low-maintenance plant, Lindheimer muhly, while getting established, can be watered during the spring and summer, then left completely alone in the fall. Fertilizer can be skipped altogether – muhly grass is tolerant of low-nutrient conditions because it is a native plant. Other yearly maintenance is optional – some people leave them alone, and some cut them back in late winter or early spring. Garden Style San Antonio (a division of San Antonio Water Systems, also known as SAWS) puts out an excellent and free weekly e-newsletter with wonderful landscape design and conservation tips. They say that Lindheimer muhly can be cropped or “crew-cut” early in the spring to clear out spent brown leaves, but that can make it very slow to recover. A far less obtrusive method of tidying it up is to just break off the dead leaves by hand and comb through it with a sturdy rake.

**WHERE TO FIND IT**

Our local N.I.C.E. nurseries have happily agreed to stock up on our Plant of the Season in order to have it available to the public. These independent nurseries carry only the best plants for our area, as well as high-quality soil amendments and gardening supplies.

Look for the “N.I.C.E. Plant of the Season” sign stake at these nurseries and growers in Kerrville, Fredericksburg, and Medina:
Community Education Classes
Is anyone interested in teaching a community education class this fall? If so, please contact rachelm@fisd.org by Aug.14. The classes will follow the COVID-19 protocols and be taught in person.

Our Video Productions
If you missed any of our three chapter videos that have been in previous newsletters, you can still watch them from the links below. Ah, the magic of the internet!

Kathy Lyles' Yard Tour

Al Smith's Native Orchid Program
Al has updated the care for the Cymbidium orchid. Until we figure out how to slip a slide into the presentation, we'll add his further thoughts here.

The Cymbidium orchid can get infested with white spots that are known as scale; a small insect that can kill the host plant. When the scale becomes noticeable you want to isolate the plant from your other orchids and start treatment to control the scale. I used rubbing alcohol on a cloth and rubbed it on the leaves where infested. This is not very satisfactory since the alcohol tends to dissolve the waxy layer on the leaves causing them to dry out. A better method is to use warm soapy water and wash the leaves carefully. Be sure to rinse the leaves thoroughly to remove any soap. Several treatments may be required.

Bergman Ranch Tour
Still On For Fall:

**Plant sale** – Thursday, Oct. 1
At Gilbriar Gazebo with COVID-19 precautions

**NLCP 1 class** - Saturday Oct. 17
Taught virtually by Mary Frushour, Kathy Saucier & Paula Stone

Check out the resources on our website [https://npsot.org/wp/fredericksburg/](https://npsot.org/wp/fredericksburg/)
Thanks, Denise Coulter, for maintaining it and emailing these newsletters for me.

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Paula Stone, Pres.
Fredericksburg Chapter
Native Plant Society of Texas