



**April  
2020**

# Riverside Nature Notes

*Dear Members and Friends... by Becky Etzler, Executive Director*



Each month I am tasked with writing an article for the newsletter and each month I review what I have written for that month in past years. I wouldn't want to be accused of being repetitive. But maybe this one time, I can get away with repeating myself.

In the 2019 April edition I wrote in response to a March deep freeze, "Another possible lesson could be that not all set backs are necessarily bad. Sometimes they uncover alternatives. Instead of nectaring on mountain laurel flowers, the bees found nourishment in the often maligned cranesbill bloom that did not freeze."

Today, we find ourselves seeking out alternatives to our normal routines and way of life. Just as all the "wild" inhabitants of our earth must do on a daily basis. If one source of nourishment or shelter is not available, the bird, bee, insect, fish or mammal must be flexible in their choice and seek a suitable substitute. It may not be preferred and it may not be ideal but the choice is made to survive another day.

As humans, we have a huge advantage. We can see beyond today. We can visualize tomorrow and the near future. It is called hope. This current crisis we are all sharing is temporary. Yes, it is difficult and it is daunting but we can and will get through this whole and as a caring community.

Each of us have a duty to ourselves and to our neighbors to do what we can to prevent the spread of this virus. That is why we closed the doors at Riverside Nature Center. The welfare of our staff,

volunteers and visitors is of tantamount importance. But the question that is on many nonprofits and businesses' lips is:

Will Riverside Nature Center survive this crisis?

I resoundingly say YES! Will it be easy? Probably not. But as I said earlier, humans have an advantage and it is called hope. I trust that Riverside Nature Center's extended family believes in our mission and importance in the community. I trust that this same extended family will pool their resources to ensure the nature center is here, healthy and thriving, for generations to come. After all, what we are all doing is *planting seeds for the future*.

In closing, I will again borrow from last year's article:

"The point of all these "perhaps" and "maybe's" is this: allow yourself to observe the natural world around you and you may find solutions to your own issues. Remember we are not above, below or to the side of nature, but intricately interwoven in the web of life."

Until next time...

Photo Credit: Liz Ross





## Riverside Nature Center Upcoming Events & Programs

**April Events have been postponed or cancelled.**

**Visit our website or facebook for more information and updates on event resheduling.**

**Go to**

**<https://riversidenaturecenter.org/2020/03/27/educational-activities-to-do-at-home/>**

**for kid & family friendly educational activities to do at home.**

**For more information on upcoming events visit:**

**<http://riversidenaturecenter.org/about-rnc/calander/>**

# What you may see

Written By Martha Miesch

Photos By Marilyn Knight



*Salvia pentstemonoides* (Lamiaceae), also known as **Big Red Sage**, produces towering, deep pinkish-red flower stalks, and blooms from late spring through summer.



**Cedar Sage**-*Salvia romeriana* (Lamiaceae), is a red-flowered, hirsute, perennial salvia that grows from 1 to 2 feet tall, with rounded, scalloped leaves.



**Greenthread** or *Thelesperma filifolium* (Asteraceae) has branched stems with leaves divided into thread-like segments. The yellow, daisy-like flowers occur on delicate, leafless stalks.



**Prairie Phlox**- *Phlox pilosa* ssp. *piloso* (Polemoniaceae) is a mounded perennial that grows 1-2 ft. tall and bears clusters of pale pink to lavender flowers.



**Texas Parsley** or *Polytaenia texana* (Apiaceae) can be found on rocky soils in the Hill Country and is known to bloom from April through May.



**White Prickly Poppy**- *Argemone albiflora* (Papaveraceae) has cupped, white flowers at the top of a tall, bristly stem. The plant has white juice that turns yellow after it has dried.



# Looking For A Few Eager Gardeners!

Each week (usually on Wednesday morning) a group of intrepid workers with a passion for plants and a love of the outdoors, meets at Riverside Nature Center to help maintain some of RNC's gardens, particularly the butterfly garden and the meadows. This is an excellent opportunity to learn about native plants and their place in the Hill Country ecosystem from others who share your passion for nature. Whether you are an experienced nature lover or just getting started in your journey learning about our local plants and the wildlife that depend on them, you are welcome to join this group as we experience the beauty of our Hill Country home.

As our plants bloom, mature and go to seed, the gleaning part of their life cycle comes into play. RNC's garden tenders actively gather, clean, store and (later) sow seed from our native flora. Here is an excellent opportunity for learning the who-what-when-why-and-how of gleaning and propagating our native plant species.

Volunteer hours are counted by both Riverside Nature Center & Texas Master Naturalists.

For further information, please contact Lydia Jetson ([rnc.kerrville@gmail.com](mailto:rnc.kerrville@gmail.com))





# Chowing Down On Pricklypear? Nutrient Value Of Pads & Fruit

Written By Bob Howells



Many of us have seen pricklypear pads or fruits in the local grocery stores, but fewer of us have eaten them. A few years ago, during a presentation on invasive cacti around the world, I was asked about the food value of eating pricklypears. The question stopped me cold because I had no idea what, if any, nutrient value there actually was. Certainly, we eat foods like iceberg lettuce that have very few nutrients. So, simply because a product is sold for human consumption is not guarantee that it is actually worth eating. Upon doing a bit of research, here are some of the points related to eating pricklypear.

For some time, typical pricklypears of the genus *Opuntia* were considered distinct from a related plant in the genus *Nopalea* (whose flowers differ by remaining more tubular and not opening widely). Some botanists now lump both groups together. Pads of both, were consumed by people under the names nopales, nopaletias, and tunas. Pricklypear pads are actually modified stems, not leaves, as some dietary references suggest. The term, tuna, is often applied to both green pad and fruits.

In general, pricklypears are very-low calorie vegetables. One reference reports only 16 calories per 100 grams of pricklypear pad. One wouldn't want to focus on pricklypear pads as a major energy food, to generate body heat, or help with weight gain. On the other hand, it is reported to be a rich source of fiber, especially non-carbohydrate fiber. Fiber can help with LDL-cholesterol control, reduction in weight, and generally helping food move through the digestive tract. In particular, pricklypear appears to be associated with helping regulate blood sugar levels by improving insulin sensitivity and preventing the liver from releasing glucose in the blood stream.

They may have some anti-inflammatory and immune boosting traits. Some sources claim antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activity is actually quite strong. Others link antioxidant properties to claims of helping in cancer prevention. One animal study even claimed pricklypear to be useful in preventing skin cancer.

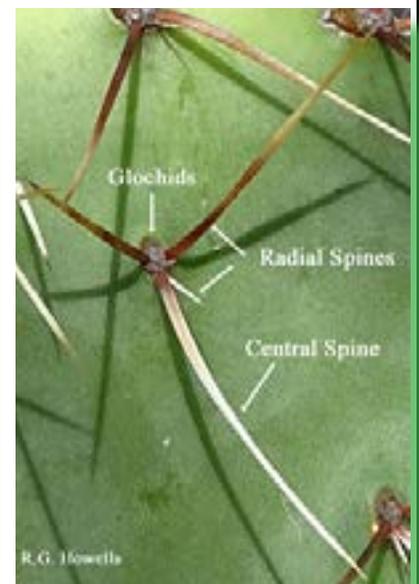
Other studies report moderately levels of vitamin-A and Beta-carotene. More limited levels of B-complex, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and pantothenic acid have also been found. Fresh pads are also linked to moderate amounts of vitamin-C. Minerals like calcium, potassium, and iron are also present, but in small amounts.

Pricklypear fruits or tunas are similarly high in fiber. Sources indicate they contain some 18 amino acids, as well as various nutrients, minerals, and vitamins. Some report they help with diarrhea, sore throats, and respiratory issues.

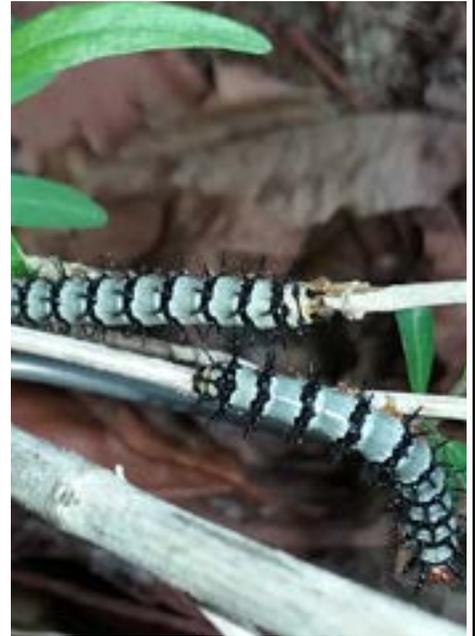
However, as with many diet-related products, claims of benefits often outstrip scientific certainty. Pricklypears have been called a super food for treating diabetes, lowering cholesterol, treating hangovers, and even having anti-viral properties. Some web sites even tout it as reducing or eliminating hair loss. As with most claims, things that sound too good to be true, usually are. Some claims are true, others may be as well, but some touted traits are likely more advertising hype and wishful thinking than reality. In my case, mom passed along a gene causing male-pattern baldness that plagues me to this day. If I seriously thought rubbing *Opuntia* sap on my head would help, my scalp would be sticky.... it is not. But, to each his own.

After thought: Commercial pricklypear growers often prefer spineless strains over heavily armed varieties. Even pricklypear species with heavy spines occasionally produce spineless mutations. However, in nature, predators usually eliminate these spineless morphs except in inaccessible locations. Over century ago, Luther Burbank developed multiple species and hybrid strains of spineless pricklypears, particularly for human consumption and animal forage. The original identity of spineless pricklypears grown horticulturally or available in local markets has often been lost over the years.

All that said, note too that pricklypears and some of their relatives possess not only larger central and radial spines, but very tiny spine-like glochids as well. Be aware that apparently spineless pricklypears can occasionally produce an odd spine and often produce a few glochids. Always be careful to remove any spines or glochids before consuming them. Several years ago, I gave some fresh pricklypear pads to a tortoise that lives with me. Unfortunately, she got a glochid stuck in her tongue. It proved so unpleasant that she has subsequently refused to eat another pricklypear since. I managed to get a tiny glochid stuck in my own tongue once and found trying to remove it quite a challenge. Trust me, it was an experience you do not want to have.



## Spotted @ RNC



The caterpillars pictured above will soon become the Crimson Patch Butterfly. These caterpillars enjoy living & feeding on the Flame Acanthus, which we have on the RNC grounds. The middle picture shows a caterpillar already in the chrysalis stage.



## Spring Break Bird Nests



During Spring Break families were invited to spend some time at RNC & enjoy some nature crafts. One of which was nest building, where individuals built their own small scale bird nests with natural materials a bird might use for their own nest.





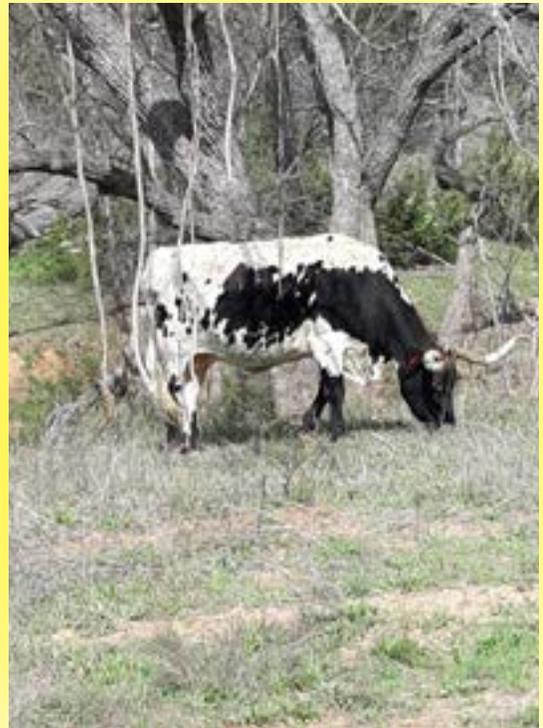
## **We Would Love To See Your Pictures!**

The greatest thing about nature is that even during this time of social distancing it is always available. Even if you only go as far as your own back yard there is always something incredible to see. We would love for you to share any photos you take of a nice flower, cool cloud, interesting bug, or anything else you may see in nature (please keep it family friendly) on our facebook page. You can also share on instagram by using the hashtag #rnckerrville.

Some of your pictures may even end up in our monthly newsletter! Nature is beautiful & it's even better when it can be shared with others.



Photos by: Haley Maples





## RNC New Members

2/25/20 thru 3/25/20

Ronald & Janice Childers

## RNC Donors

2/25/20 thru 3/25/20

Mr. & Mrs. Jack Millikan

Harriet Redwine

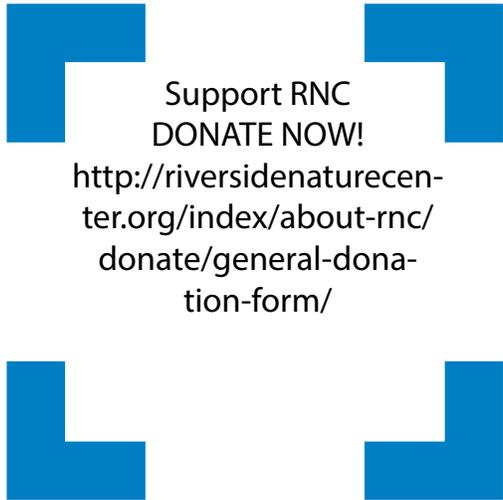
Dr. Gloria P Olsen

## Partners In Nature



La Quinta  
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Support RNC  
DONATE NOW!

<http://riversidenaturecenter.org/index/about-rnc/donate/general-donation-form/>

### What is a Riverside Nature Center?

Located at the confluence of the Guadalupe River and Town Creek in the Hill Country town of Kerrville —2010 population, 22,347— Riverside Nature Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, owned by its members and primarily operated by volunteers.

Our mission is to advance the stewardship of our natural environment. We provide quality educational experiences for the community’s children, adults and families; and we serve as a resource center for the community on native plants and nature related information.

### Riverside Nature Center

*150 Francisco Lemos St.  
Kerrville, Texas 78028  
(830)257-4837*

*[www.riversidenaturecenter.org](http://www.riversidenaturecenter.org)*



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(Riverside Nature Center Association)



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