

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



**PHOTO CREDIT: William M. Johnson**



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**Bluebonnets are putting on spectacular floral displays nowadays. Although blue is the predominant flower color, bluebonnets with pink or white flowers also occur.**

Even though it's a show appearing in limited areas, bluebonnets are starting to put on spectacular floral displays nowadays. A couple of weeks back I was traveling on HWY. 3 in the League City area and there by the roadway was a sizable patch of bluebonnets. I saw a similar size patch of bluebonnets in the Texas

City area about a week ago.

As I was walking through the Discovery Garden in Carbide Park over the past weekend, I was very pleased to see a well-established patch of bluebonnets that were in full bloom. While most of the bluebonnets had blue flow-

ers, other bluebonnets had produced flowers that were pink. Several Master Gardeners were also admiring the flowers as they were excited about seeing this year's patch of bluebonnets which had grown from seeds produced from last year's crop.

Then came the obvious



question from one Master Gardener "If the flowers are pink, are they still called bluebonnets?" The answer is yes, bluebonnets with pink flowers—or white flowers—are still called bluebonnets. I have seen all three flower colors, as well as variations of these colors, along the roadside while driving in the Brenham area.

While the Brenham area may be acknowledged by many as the bluebonnet capital of central Texas, motorists need only to keep a watchful eye out here in Galveston County to view one of nature's majestic creations.

The lore, history and biology of our state's floral symbol are rather fascinating.

Bluebonnets have been lived since humans first trod the vast Texas prairies. Indians wove fascinating folk tales around them. Early day Spanish priests gathered the seeds and grew them around missions. This practice gave rise to the myth that the padres had brought the plant from Spain, but this cannot be true since the two predominant species of bluebonnets are found growing naturally only in Texas—and no place else.

As historian Jack Maguire so aptly wrote, "It's not only the state flower but also a kind of floral trademark almost as well known to outsiders as cowboy boots and the Stetson hat." He also wrote that "The bluebonnet is to Texas what the shamrock is to Ireland,

the cherry blossom to Japan, the lily to France, the rose to England and the tulip to Holland."

As our state flower, bluebonnets have an interesting history. Texas actually has five state flowers, more or less, and they are all bluebonnets. The five state flowers are all species classified within the genus *Lupinus*.

In the spring of 1901, the Texas Legislature got down to the serious business of selecting a state floral emblem. The ensuing battle was hot and heavy.

One legislator spoke emotionally in favor of the cotton boll since cotton was king in Texas in those days. Another legislator, a young gentleman from Uvalde, so eloquently extolled the virtues of the cactus, noting the hardy durability of the plant and the orchid-like beauty of its flowers, that he earned the nickname "Cactus Jack." He was John Nance Garner and later became vice president during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration.

But the National Society of Colonial Dames of America in Texas won the day. Their choice of bluebonnets was *Lupinus subcarnosus* ("generally known as buffalo clover or bluebonnet," stated the resolution) and it was passed into law without any recorded opposition.

But some folks thought it was the least attractive of the Texas blue-

bonnets. They wanted *Lupinus texensis*, the showier, bolder bluebonnet that most folks nowadays associate as being our State flower. So, off and on for 70 years, the Legislature was encouraged to correct its oversight. But the now much-wiser-by-experience legislators weren't about to get caught in another botanical trap. Nor did they want to offend the supporters of *Lupinus subcarnosus*.

In 1971, the Legislature handled the dilemma by adding the two species together, plus "any other variety of bluebonnet not heretofore recorded," and lumped them all into one state flower as well. More than one member of our present-day Legislature (as well as other lawmaking bodies across the nation) probably wish such a Solomon-like remedy exists for all politically-charged issues before them.

If you're interested in getting your own "backyard patch" of bluebonnets established, you can use either chemically scarified seed or bluebonnet transplants. Regardless of whether you use seeds or transplants, late October to November is the ideal time to get your own bluebonnet patch going in Galveston County. Once an area is established, and with a little care, such as not mowing them until after their seed pods have opened, you'll be treated to a yearly grand floral display in your own landscape.

