

BLUEBONNETS: TO PICK OR NOT PICK—that is the question

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: William M. Johnson



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Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

Insect pest or beneficial? Gardeners are sometimes confused about which insect is a pest and which is a beneficial. Dr. William M. Johnson will provide a presentation on Beneficials in the Garden from 1 to 3 p.m. on Saturday, April 13, at the at the Friendswood Public Library.

Question: You discussed bluebonnets in your last column. Is it illegal to pick bluebonnet flowers along Texas highways?

Answer: The answer is no! The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) is called upon to clarify this matter on an annual basis.

In fact, the Public Information Office of DPS issued a clarification on this subject a few years back on their web site.

Unfortunately, the press release at that time was titled "DPS says: Don't pick the bluebonnets!" which did not help allevi-

ate the confusion. However, their press release years back and now very recently goes on to state ". . . there is no law against picking our State Flower. However, there are laws against criminal trespass—so make sure you're not on private property when you stop

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to take your annual kids-in-the-bluebonnets photo."

I know many folks might argue the point in spite of the fact that those charged with enforcing such legislation (if it did exist) state that there is no legislative basis for this popular myth. Urban legends tend to have a life of their own and it does not help that we are often told from school age on that it's illegal to pick our state flower. Neither does it help when many other sources (including the Internet) continue to fuel this misconception.

Yes, bluebonnets are accorded special status as our state flower but that status does not convey special preservation or protection. When you think about it, our state fruit is the Texas red grapefruit and we eat it. Our state tree is the pecan and we eat pecans. One of our mammals is the armadillo and we try to do a lot of things to it when it becomes bothersome.

I say that the all-things-in-moderation concept applies here. Bluebonnets, as wildflowers, need to have their seeds spread along the sides of the road, in fields, and in other areas to produce next year's crop of bluebonnet plants. So, when you pick a bunch of flowers, those seeds (or would be seeds) go with you instead of going back into next year's blossoms.

As the DPS press release notes: "There are laws against damaging or destroying rights-of-way and government property—so pick a

few flowers, but don't dig up clumps of them and don't drive your vehicle into the midst of them."

Question: My sago palm has several suckers along its base. Can I use the suckers to grow more sago palms?

Answer: Yes, you can. But first things first, most people don't realize that the sago palm is not a palm at all but belong to a group of very primitive plants known as cycads. Secondly, the suckers or shoots are also known as "pups."

The sago palm has become a very popular landscape item. Pups or suckers are a wonderful source of new plants. Removing and planting the pups that appear on and around the parent plant is quite easy. Pups may be loosely attached to the mother plant and can be easily popped off or they can be more firmly attached and require a little more effort to remove.

Pups can be removed at any time, but mid-spring to early summer is probably best since plants are actively growing. Pups should be removed before they get too large. For easiest removal and best results, the enlarged "bulb-like" stem of the offset should be less than 4-5 inches in diameter. Larger offsets should be left on the parent plant as it will develop into a branch and may eventually produce more offsets.

Set the detached pup aside for 4-to-5 days to allow the cut area to

"heal" or callus over. Pups are then planted in pots with a well-draining potting mix. Place pups into pot so that about 1/3 of the bulb is into the soil. Keep the plants in semi-shade until well rooted, which may take several months. For best results, match the size of the pup to a pot only slightly larger. Doing so makes it easier to water correctly. Move pups up to the next size pot, but never overpot a pup as they will grow faster if you keep them in pots only slightly larger than the root system.

Two notes of caution: 1.) Sago palms can become quite large with a leaf span of over 6 feet in diameter. Choose an area which will allow ample room for future growth and is not located next to walkways (unless you wish to deter relatives or neighbors from visiting your abode) or near mail boxes (unless you're looking for a way to stop delivery of those bills), and 2.) Sago palms are armed with sharp spines so wear a good pair of leather gloves when working with this plant.

Upcoming Seminar

WHAT: Beneficials Insects in the Garden and Landscape

WHEN: 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 13

WHO: Presented by Dr. William M. Johnson, County Extension Agent-Horticulture

WHERE: [Friendswood Public Library](#), 416 S. Friendswood Drive, Friendswood, 77546

