



These bluebonnets grow along Texas highways, with a little help from state officers. Picking the Texas

state flower, and most other wildflowers in the state, is illegal and can result in fines up to \$400.

## Texas' annual blues

By Colette Hutchings

*Battalion Staff*

You probably noticed them on the roadsides while driving back to school from spring break.

And if you're a newcomer to Texas — are you in for a treat.

Texas wildflowers are making their annual appearance, and although the flowers haven't all bloomed, highway roadsides are promising to be as breathtaking as ever.

Indian paintbrushes, wild violets, buttercups and the ever-popular bluebonnets, grow along freeways, ditches and country roads all over the state.

Wildflowers are a part of Texas heritage. One flower — the bluebonnet — has achieved statewide acclaim as the Texas state flower.

Known as "buffalo clover," "wolf flower," and "el conejo," the bluebonnet was named for the head coverings worn by early Texas pioneer women.

Although five types of bluebonnets exist in Texas, the scientific name of the bluebonnets most common in the Bryan-College Station area are the "lupinus subcarnosus," which is a light blue color and the

"lupinus texensis," a dark blue flower. If you look closely, you may even find mutant bluebonnets, or albinos, which are white.

In efforts to keep wildflowers around, the Texas Highway Department plants and protect the wildflowers along Texas roadsides. During the blooming season, the department halts mowing operations; when mowing is resumed, part of the seed crop, called "wildflower hay," is gathered and scattered in embankments along the highways.

Nick Turnham, public affairs officer for the Texas Highway Department, said the department will mow a 15-ft. wide strip if it is hazardous to the public, but that is the only exception.

About ten years ago, Lady Bird Johnson established an award for the Texas Highway Department, for outstanding maintenance of the wildflowers.

Various divisions compete for the award and the maintenance foreman, who is judged as doing the most to promote the growth and protection of wildflowers, is chosen from statewide divisions in the department. He receives an engraved

plaque and a \$1,000 personal check from Johnson.

Although Texas wildflowers are pretty to look at — don't touch. It's a Class C misdemeanor to pick bluebonnets and wildflowers maintained and planted by the Texas Highway Department, and is punishable by fines of up to \$400.

The law is hard to enforce and most enforcement officers tend to rely on the honor system, but you never know.

Mike Kasper, a horticulture graduate student at Texas A&M, is writing his thesis on bluebonnets. When doing research he goes out on roadsides and examines the flowers, and, he said, he's been stopped several times by Highway Patrol officers. However, Kasper said, most complaints come from passersby.

"I've had a lot of people driving by who yell at me to get away from their flowers," he said.

Since wildflowers are so sentimental in the hearts of many Texans, the Texas Legislature proclaimed "Texas Wildflower Day" to be celebrated the fourth Saturday in April.

## State celebrates bluebonnet month

By Colette Hutchings

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Ever since the Texas State Legislature declared the fourth Sunday in April as Texas Wildflower Day, the beauty of the flowers have been celebrated throughout the state.

And for local wildflower enthusiasts, that means plenty of tours are available so the beautiful array of wildflowers won't be missed.

Below are activities sponsored by local organizations:

**The Brazos Valley Museum, Brazos Center** — A wildflower tour will be held every Sunday during April. The cost for the tour is \$6 and it will be from 2 to 5 p.m. Participants should meet at the museum and transportation will be provided. Guides will be touring the Wellborn and Benchley areas.

Tour guides are Dr. Fred Smeins, a range science professor; Dr. Ed McWilliams, a horticulture professor; Barron Rector, a range specialist from the Texas A&M extension service and Dr. Greg Brown, a biology professor.

McWilliams said the tour will consist of helping others identify the various wildflowers with

the help of lectures and books.

**The Brenham-Washington County Chamber of Commerce** — are sponsoring Bluebonnet trails all weekends in April. Designated bluebonnet trails will be on all country and farm roads leading into the area. The Chamber of Commerce office will be open Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and a trailer booth will be open from 12 to 4 p.m. on Sundays. Volunteers will be there give out maps which outline the best sightings for flowers along with a complementary token of seeds.

Margret Gim, secretary for the Chamber of Commerce, said the best crop should be out in about three weeks.

**The Brazos Valley Museum, Brazos Center** — will hold a wildflower exhibit featuring paintings, dried flowers, wildflower books artwork and various other items will wildflowers on them. The museum hours are Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and 1 p.m. through 5 p.m. on Sundays.

**Texas Womens' University** — will hold a wildflower symposium April 24.

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