RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

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Keep Texas Wild

HOMEGROWN GREENERY

Our native plant life is vital to our way of life.

Live oaks in a field of wildflowers

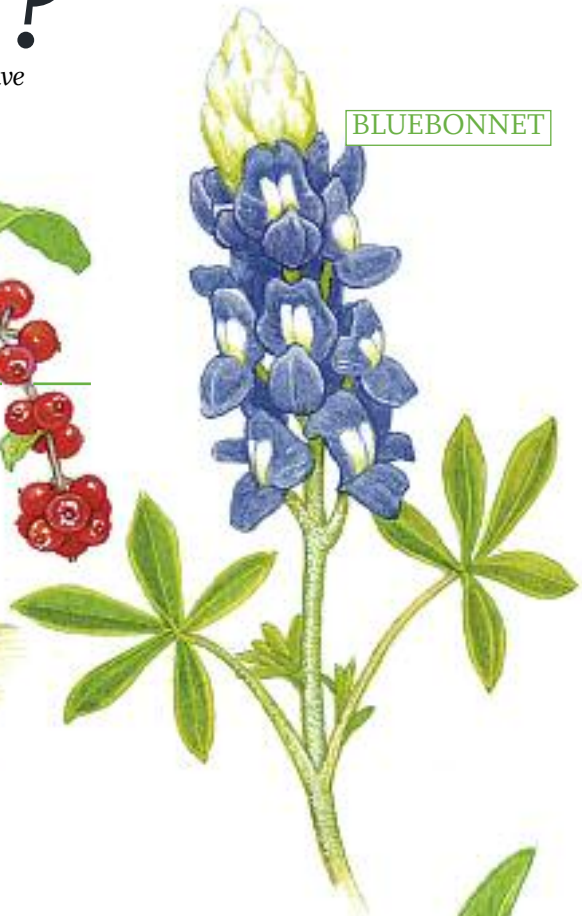
PHOTO © LAURENCE PARENT

» WONDERFULLY WILD

STEP OUTSIDE AND LOOK AROUND. Wherever you live, plants of all kinds — trees, grass, flowers, vines and shrubs — surround you. However, someone probably planted some of what you see, such as carpet grass or marigolds. For a moment, try to imagine how the landscape looked before your home or school was built. What might have grown there before Native Americans or early settlers arrived? One species is the majestic live oak tree. To this day, many huge, old oaks still survive. Trees and other plants that have grown in Texas since before European explorers arrived are called "native." Should we care whether a plant is native or not? Yes! Because plants (and animals) that are native to an area depend on each other and can't get what they need to survive from non-native species.

»Native or Not?

Some plants are native to the area in which they grow, while other plants have grown in the natural habitat for so long that people think they belong there.



NATIVE

A plant that's always grown naturally in a habitat.

NATURALIZED

A plant that was planted by people within the past few hundred years and adapted well to Texas habitat.

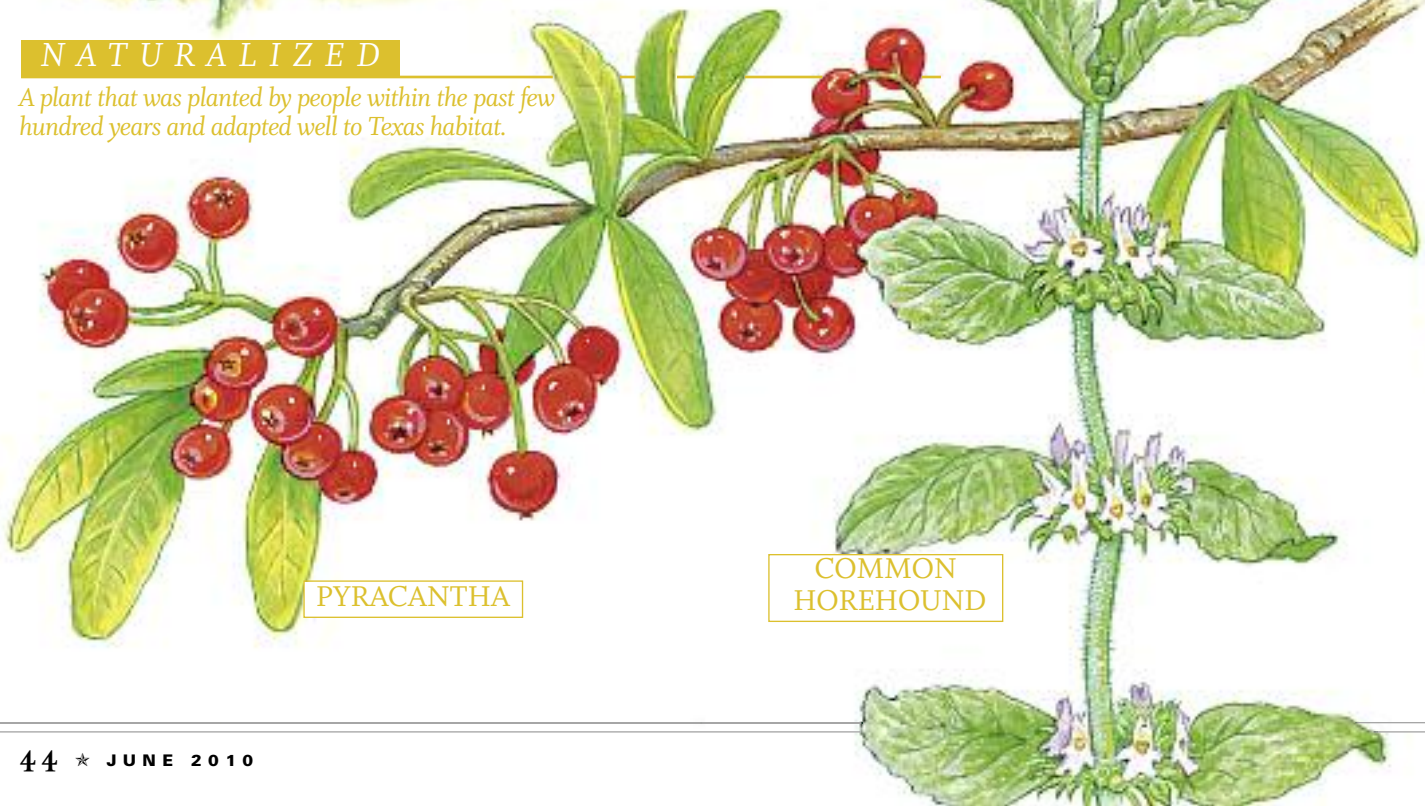


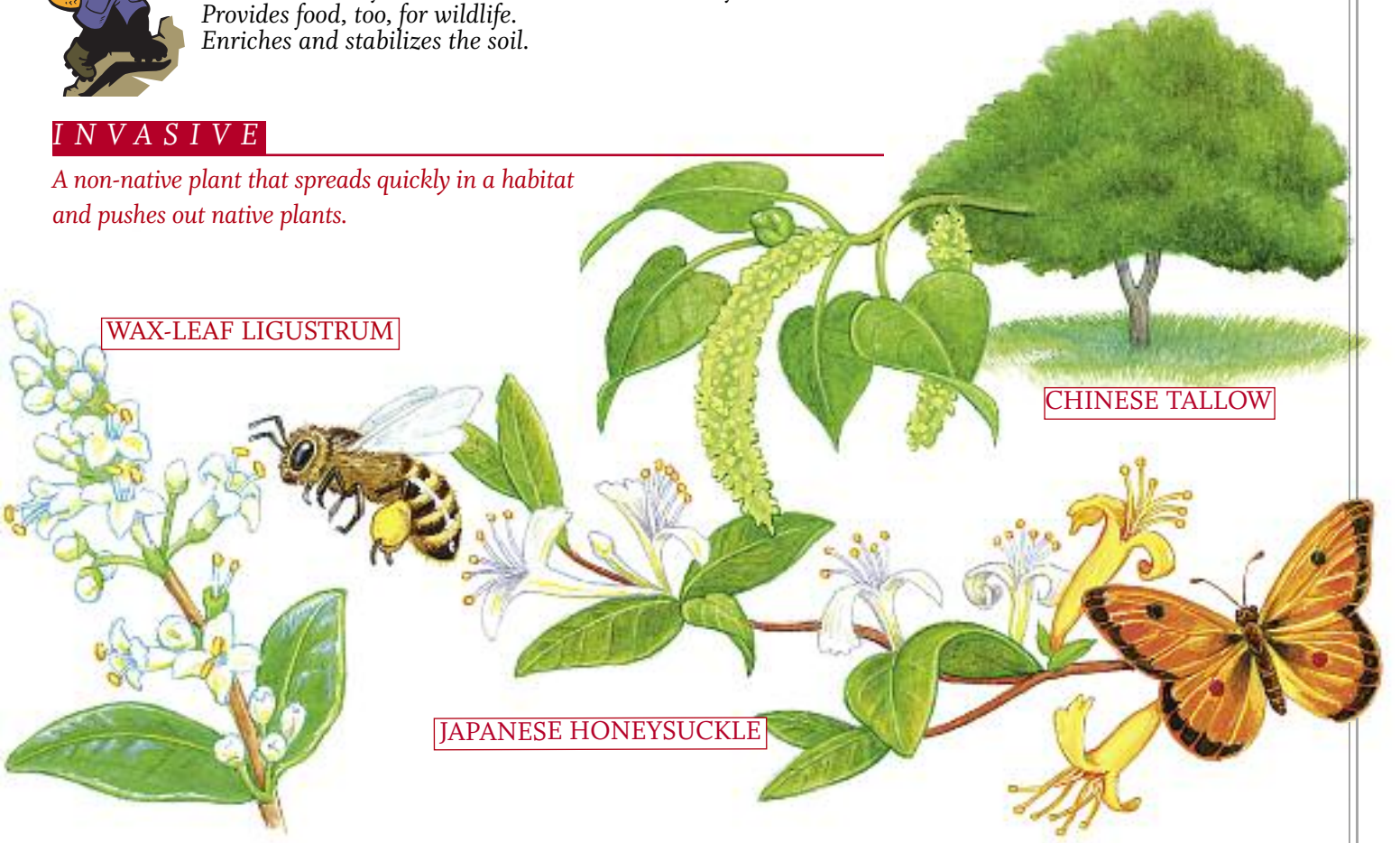
ILLUSTRATION © ALTON LANGFORD

A PIECE OF NATURE'S PUZZLE

Native plant life is part of the puzzle we call "nature." Everything's connected!
Provides shelter for native insects, birds and wildlife.
Provides food, too, for wildlife.
Enriches and stabilizes the soil.

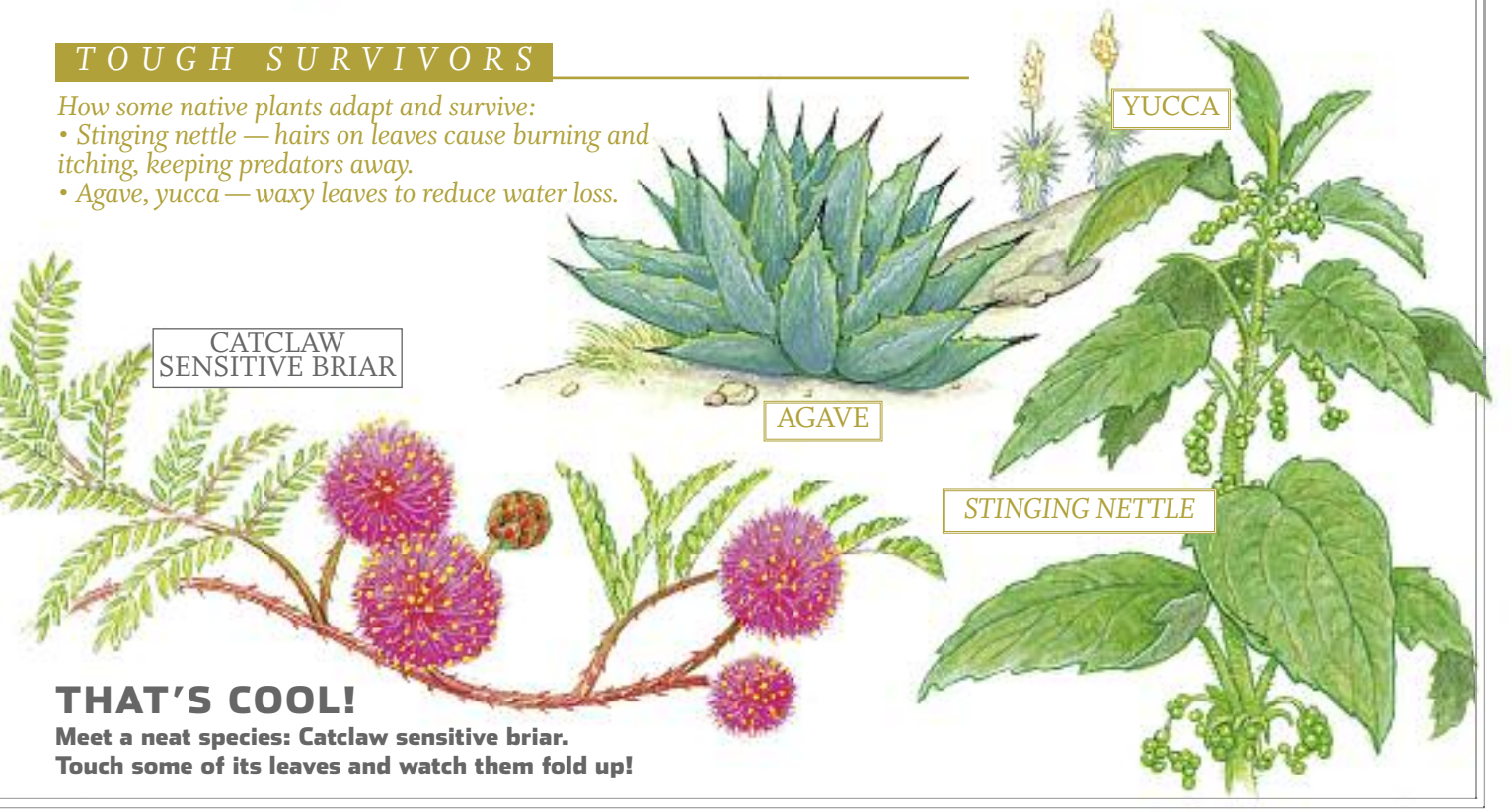
INVASIVE

A non-native plant that spreads quickly in a habitat and pushes out native plants.



TOUGH SURVIVORS

How some native plants adapt and survive:
- *Stinging nettle — hairs on leaves cause burning and itching, keeping predators away.*
- *Agave, yucca — waxy leaves to reduce water loss.*



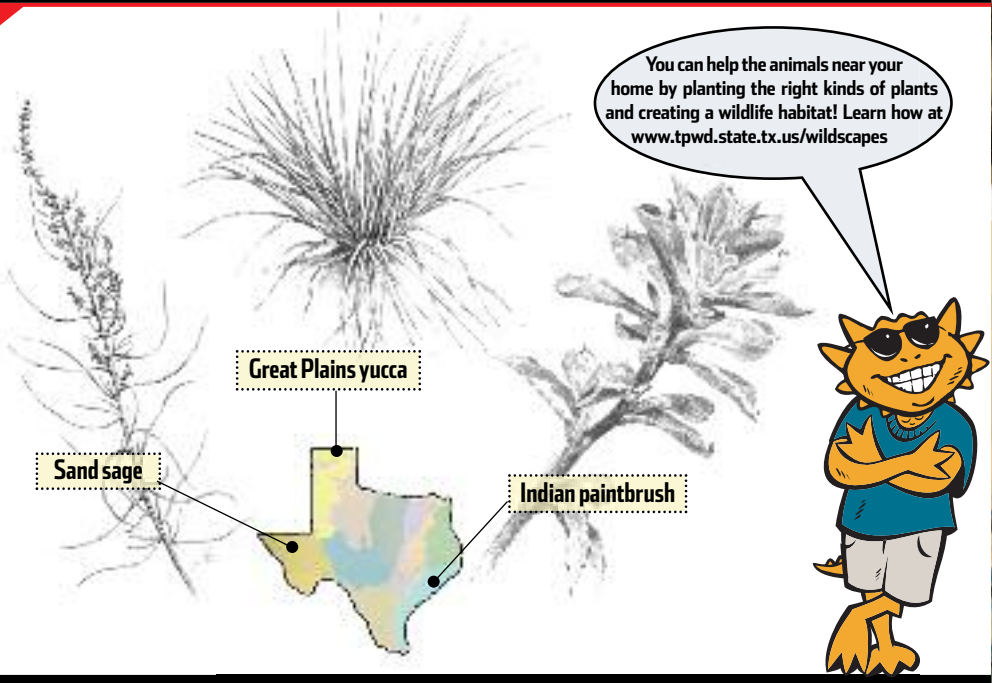
THAT'S COOL!

Meet a neat species: Catclaw sensitive briar.
Touch some of its leaves and watch them fold up!

Spike's Activity Page

KEEPING IT *WILD*

THE MORE NATIVE SPECIES you plant, the more you help nature. For example, certain butterflies require certain plants in order to reproduce. Painted lady butterflies lay eggs on common yarrow, a native plant with pretty white flowers. Many beetles also require specific plants to eat and reproduce. Ask an adult to help you select and plant species best suited for your "ecoregion," such as the piney woods of East Texas or the deserts of West Texas. Better yet, visit ***www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wildscapes*** *and find out how to create a Texas wildscape using native plants. You can even order a free DVD, "Texas Wildscapes: Gardening for Wildlife, An Interactive Guide to Creating Vibrant and Beautiful Wildlife Habitat."*



WILD *SCIENCE*

BE A BIOLOGIST and survey the "weeds" in your yard or school grounds. Collect leaf and bloom samples, and glue them on a piece of posterboard. Can you identify them? Are your plants native, naturalized or invasive? The pink evening primrose is native, while dandelions are invasive. So are they weeds or wildflowers? If you like, do a monthly survey, and you'll discover additional species because some plants die off and are replaced with new ones. Nature's always changing!

WILD *ART*

HERE'S AN IDEA that's fun and educational. Make "rock" markers for your native plants. Using a permanent black marker, write each plant's name on a smooth rock, then shellac it. The markers will look pretty and teach others about native plants, too.

NEXT MONTH:
Texas Rivers

PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM/TPWD

TEACHER RESOURCE

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