

GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of Feb. 14, 2021)

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center currently offers limited classes, and no weekend Rep-Tales and Parrot Talk, due to COVID-19 protocol, health and safety of guests. Fulfilling its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or possibly enhance your landscape!

PAPHIOPEDILUM HYBRID ORCHID 'JERRY SPENCE'

Hybrid Paphiopedilum X 'Jerry Spence' is known for its yellow and ivory petals with maroon stripes, speckled petals and a purple slipper pouch. It was originally bred by F. Booth in 1989, as a cross between Path. Rothschildianum X Paph. Berenice.

Paphiopedilum orchids, commonly called *lady slipper orchids*, have the unique pouch on the tongue petal with flowers soaring on a stalk above the vegetative plant. Dark green, often speckled strap-like leaves provide more attractive foliage than many other orchid genera.

Native to South East Asia, they are more terrestrial than many other orchid genera, so tend to prefer more moisture. They are low-light orchids which the American Orchid Society considers well-adapted as a houseplant, and may be treated similarly to African Violets.

See multiple Paphiopedilum varieties now in bloom in the Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory.



BLACKBRUSH ACACIA (*Vachellia rigidula*)

Blackbrush Acacia, a large shrub/small tree--also known as Blackbrush, Chaparro Prieto, and Gavia--is a member of the Fabaceae (Pea/Bean) family along with other native cousins mesquite, ebony, and retama. Found in South Texas thorn scrub chaparral, from Rio Grande Plains to Austin, stretching from Corpus Christi west to Big Bend, hugging the Mexican Border, it formerly was classified in genus *Acacia* with scientific names *Acacia amentacea* and *Acacia rigidula* in older literature.

It is quite drought tolerant and a good Xeriscape shrub, easily incorporated into arid landscapes and rock gardens. Known for its spiny stiff branches forming dense thicket growing 4-12 feet tall, it is one of the first plants to bloom in spring in the thornscrub with numerous spikes of pale yellow frilly flowers 1-2 inches long, often appearing on bare branches, preceding spring leaf flush.

The pale bark has a white/gray color contrasting with small dark green compound leaves. Flowers are used by bees as a pollen source and nectar source for butterflies, and granivorous birds feed on seeds after they drop. If pollinated, small brown beans form later in spring.

See Blackbrush Acacia along the Brennecke Nature Trail, with greatest population near the Palapa Grande, and behind the Arid Garden.

