

## **“WHAT’S BLOOMING?”** (Week of Sunday, August 16, 2020)

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center--currently unable to offer Saturday educational seminars, weekend Rep-Tales and Parrot Talk, or Orchid-ology series, due to State of Texas COVID-19 “gathering” restrictions, health and safety of our guests--brings you **WHAT’S BLOOMING**, each week spotlighting a blooming plant in the Exhibit Area; and a native in or near the Habitat and Trails area, which you can enjoy on a visit that week! A GREAT LEARNING ACTIVITY FOR KIDS AND ADULTS!

### **Giant Coneflower or Giant Black-Eyed Susan** *Rudbeckia maxima*

This East Texas native definitely makes a statement in the landscape! Striking golden-yellow flowers with tall dark centers tower four to five feet above the gray-green foliage, from June through fall. In early spring, the plant is a collection of impressive leathery-looking 12-inch leaves resembling an open cabbage plant.

*Rudbeckia maxima* likes moist, sandy or well-drained sunny locations, naturally found in East Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and South Carolina, according to Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Planting in a cluster creates a bold effect while blooming, easy for supplemental watering if necessary.

*Rudbeckia* plants have “ray flowers,” great nectar plants for butterflies! Visually a single blossom, but actually is a collection of tiny nectar flowers in the brown center, allowing a butterfly to sit on the blossom and drink from multiple nectar sources.

Two plantings are located in the Butterfly Garden.



### **Prickly Pear Cactus** *Opuntia phaeacantha* Engelm

Prickly Pear, a common South Texas cactus, blooms with yellow or orange flowers in March and April. The fruit or “pears” formed along the edge of the round green pads are especially impressive at summer’s end, transforming from green to dark purple as they ripen. Fruit can be harvested and eaten fresh or used in jams and jellies. While sweet on the inside, beware of the tiny thorns found on the outside, as well as the cactus pads.

Prickly Pear is among the easiest cacti to grow. The familiar round pads are specialized water-storing stems, which easily root if the pad base is planted several inches into well-drained soil. After rooting, additional pads will form. Give this plant space! As it grows, the oldest pads mature and form a thick grayish brown trunk, allowing the cactus to easily grow to heights of six to eight feet tall if left unchecked, sometimes used on rangeland as “natural” fencing.

Look for Prickly Pear in the Arid Garden, and along the Mary Hope Brennecke Nature Trail.

