Winter is one of my favorite times of year. Not only is the weather much cooler, but I’m always bowled over by the beauty of the landscape. And, contrary to popular belief, nature doesn’t shut down during winter. Although the flowers are gone and there may be snow on the ground, the plants are still there, going about their business.

Most plants undergo a period of dormancy during winter, and may appear dead. Dormancy, which occurs in both seeds and mature plants, is actually a period of rest during which active growth slows or stops completely. It often is characterized by leaf drop in trees and shrubs, and, sometimes, by death of aboveground plant parts. Dormancy is a good thing. Plants and seeds don’t expend energy germinating or producing new growth that would be damaged or killed by harsh weather, and flowers aren’t left waiting for absent pollinators. Winter temperatures help break seed dormancy in some species, allowing seeds to germinate the following spring.

That “dead, brown” plant material we tend to overlook provides forage, shelter, and nesting for a variety of wildlife, as well as warm cover for read on page 3

Regardless of our different memories of Christmas, most involve the Christmas tree. It generally occupies the most prominent place in the house, decorating it is often a family ritual, and, of course, it serves as the centerpiece for the display of gifts. The origin of the tree as a symbol of Christmas has its roots in our earliest history.

For many cultures, trees were the physical manifestation of Nature itself. Revered as the representation of spirits and the homes of gods and goddesses, it was natural for people to worship under trees and in sacred groves. Often, a particular tree would be singled out and worshiped as the manifestation of a higher deity. Eventually, sacred groves came to be regarded in much the same way as churches and temples.

read on page 3
That’s What Friends Are For...

Events, events, events, and people, people, people! This year had us moving at record pace from one activity to another, and we have many friends to thank for their contributions to our achievements. Our many events, such as the Wildflower Days Festival, the Wildflower Spring Gala, our first free-admission day, the Wildflower Serenade music series, and the Wildflower Patrons Program, have raised crucial funds while bringing new enthusiasm for our mission during this very busy year.

Through the support of our more than 22,000 members (did you know that just under half of you hail from outside Texas?) and various friends in the community, we held our annual Wildflower Days Festival in April. While the drought kept blooms down along roadsides, the Center was bright with wildflowers. Major sponsors of this very successful event included H.E.B. Food Stores, Southern Union Gas, the Austin American-Statesman newspaper, Newsradio 590 KLBJ, and MCI Telecommunications.

A highlight of the spring season was the Wildflower Spring Gala, led by dynamic Gala co-chair, Deedee Rose of Dallas. The Gala was held to honor Mr. and Mrs. Jack Blanton of Houston, co-chairs, with Mr. Nash Castro of New York, of the Capital Campaign. This successful campaign raised the funds to build our wonderful new facility.

Our special thanks to Randall’s Food Stores, who underwrote our first free-admission day at the Center last August. More than 400 visitors braved the Texas heat and were astounded by the blooms.

...continued on page 6

Mae Daniller is the Wildflower Center’s Director of Development

Diversity is Wonderful!

Diversity is essential in nature, and provides the necessary balance for healthy ecosystems. We at the Wildflower Center also depend on diversity, especially among our supporters, to further our mission and ensure our continued leadership in the field of native plant preservation and reestablishment.

A key element of our diversity is our members, who read this newsletter, ask astute questions of our botanists, and enjoy participating in the many programs and events sponsored by the Wildflower Center. In addition, our many visitors bring us new insight to their interests and needs, and reinforce the effectiveness of the exhibits, gardens, and publications we provide. Finally, there are those who provide funding through participation in our gala, sponsor our education and outreach programs, and support our garden research.

We could not be more grateful for the diversity of supporters or the diversity of support we have received this year. Our small staff could never achieve our lofty goals without your enthusiasm for our programs and your belief in the Center’s mission.

Thank you for making it possible for us to promote native plants, sow the seeds of knowledge, and achieve the funding goals to help meet the needs of this thriving organization. Please accept our deepest appreciation for your help in making the Wildflower Center one of North America’s leading environmental organizations.
Wonderland

plant seedlings which sprouted in fall. Fruits and berries are a nutritious food source for animal populations, especially many bird species that don't migrate.

Biology aside, nature has its own winter beauty. Grasses, which have gone to seed, offer a wide variety of beautiful shapes and textures against a white carpet of snow. The rustle of spent seed heads moving in the breeze provides a soothing counterpoint to winter’s inherent stillness. Fruits and berries create startling splashes of color on the winter landscape, and the vibrant hues of lustrous evergreen leaves remind us that nature is only sleeping and spring is just around the corner.

Winter trees have their own surreal beauty. The outlines of bare branches contrasting starkly against gray skies resemble a mad architect’s city skyline. Ice covered branches sparkle in the sunlight. Dangling icicles act as prisms, sending rainbows across the snow.

Take some extra time this year to look closely at the winter landscape. I think you'll be surprised at the often overlooked and hidden beauty. And take to heart the words of Anne Bradstreet: ‘If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant.’

continued from page 1

Christmas Tree

The rites and ceremonies that took place in these sacred groves often involved sacrifices and gifts, placed on the ground beneath the tree or in its branches. In her book, The Solstice Evergreen, author Sheryl Karas recounts how the Druids of ancient Europe placed apples in the branches of oaks and firs during their winter solstice as thanks to Odin (their chief deity).

Lighted candles, thanking Balder the sun god, also were placed in branches. The connection between today’s Christmas tree and the sacred tree of old is hard to ignore.

Evergreens were held in the highest regard, and were seen to symbolize life and strength. Unlike deciduous species such as oaks and birches, evergreens didn’t drop their leaves during the winter, appearing fresh, green, and vibrantly alive throughout the long cold months. This quality led people to believe that evergreens were stronger than other trees, and they came to represent eternal life.

Trees also played a central role in ancient people’s understanding of the universe and their place in it. A common perception of the universe was of a sphere cut in half by a horizontal plane. The three cosmic regions, Earth, heaven, and hell, were linked via a central axis, often symbolized as a tree. Communication between the three regions took place through this Tree of Life, and when a person died, their soul returned to the Tree to await its next incarnation.

With the advent of Christianity, many of these beliefs about the universe and the sacred tree were set aside. As Christianity made its way into France, England, and Germany, pagan worship of any kind was forbidden. The old gods and goddesses were declared devils, and it became a sin even to speak their names. Tree worship was outlawed, and many sacred trees and groves were destroyed.

Certain popular holidays, such as Yule, and customs, such as lighting candles and offering small sacrifices under certain holy trees, could not be stopped. Christian priests gave these holidays new meanings and incorporated them into Christian rituals. Candles now symbolized Christ as the light of the world and the small sacrifices came to represent gifts the wise men brought the Christ child.

During the Middle Ages, Paradise Plays were performed in front of or inside churches. Paradise Plays told the story of the Creation and the Fall of Adam and Eve, the only prop: an evergreen fir hung with apples. A variation on the ancient Yule Tree, it represented both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. Gradually, the Paradise Tree made its way out of churches and into Christian homes. Symbolizing the coming of the Savior, the Paradise Tree often stood next to the Yule Tree, which symbolized eternal life. It was only natural that, eventually, one tree took the place of both. Thus was born the Christmas tree.

continued from page 1
Winter Species

Botanical Name: *Liquidambar styraciflua*

- Pronunciation: Li-kwid AM-bar styr-ak-ee-flua
- Common Name: Sweetgum
- Family: Hamamelidaceae (Witch Hazel)

The mace-like fruits are actually composed of many individual fruits which mature in fall and persist throughout winter.

Botanical Name: *Sorghastrum nutans*

- Pronunciation: Sor-geh-strum nut-ans
- Common Name: Indian grass
- Family: Poaceae (Grass)

This warm season native perennial blooms from August through September and provides grazing for wildlife.

Botanical Name: *Ilex decidua*

- Pronunciation: EYE-lex-dee-sid-ee-ah
- Common Name: Possumhaw winterberry
- Family: Aquifoliaceae (Holly)

Preferring moist soils along streams and in swamps, possumhaw is so called because opossums (and other mammals and birds) love the bright red fruit.

Botanical Name: *Cornus florida*

- Pronunciation: COR-nus flor-i-dah
- Common Name: Flowering dogwood
- Family: Cornaceae (Dogwood)

The flowering dogwood is easily the most beautiful Eastern North American tree. Its showy spring flowers, scarlet fall foliage, and brilliant red fruits provide year-round color throughout its range.
Watch Out For Wild Drivers!

The pinkish blossoms of the mountain laurel (Kalmia latifolia), the state flower of Connecticut, are getting very good mileage these days – as much as 35 miles-per-gallon or better. Thanks to the efforts of the Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut, Inc. (members of the National Council of State and Local Garden Clubs), Connecticut drivers can purchase a special interest “Protect Wildflowers” license plate featuring the blooms of this native shrub. If your state offers a similar license plate featuring our native North American flora, please send this information to the Wildflower Center, 4801 La Crosse Ave., Austin, TX 78739, Attn: Editor.

License plate courtesy of the Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut, Inc.

Wild Ideas for the Holidays

What better way to begin the holiday season than at the Wildflower Center’s annual Wild Ideas holiday shopping event December 6 & 7.

Besides the free admission and 10% member discount you enjoy every day, you also will enjoy tax-free shopping Friday and Saturday, December 6 and 7. New specials and several surprises will be featured every day, and artists and artisans will be on hand to sell special pieces. Hours are 9 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday and Noon – 5 p.m. Sunday.

Call (512) 292-4300 for more information.

NEW ENGLAND

SOUTHEAST

OKLAHOMA/TXAS

WEST
not deterred by the drought.

The summer was punctuated by three
wonderful Wildflower Serenades, which
drew record crowds. Major media sponsors
KASE/KVET Radio and etc. magazine
spread the word for performances by Kelly
Willis, The Geezinslaws, and Don Walser.
In addition, Dell Webb’s Sun City
Georgetown ended the season on a high
note by being a major sponsor for Don
Walser in October. To all – our applause.

And, of course, we continue to wel-
come new supporters to our Wildflower
Patrons Program. This year, Wildflower
Patrons enjoyed special receptions and are
looking forward to a Patron’s dinner next
spring. We also are thrilled to recognize
our Wildflower Patron’s Council members,
who support the Center’s general programs
and broaden our constituency to include
their employees and friends. Members of
the Patrons Council include businesses
such as The Whitley Company, and we are
eager to welcome others to this program.

Finally, the Center is grateful to the
supporters of our education programs, such
as 3M and the Rockwell Fund, Inc. They
help make our education programs a focal
point for our many visitors from across
North America.

Thanks to your support and commit-
tment, 1997 will be a lively year. While we
can’t thank all our supporters in this small
space, know we could never fulfill our
goals without you. Thank you for the ener-
gy and support you bring to our cause.

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**Give A Gift For All Seasons: MEMBERSHIP**

in the National Wildflower Research Center

This holiday season, share the joy of wildflowers and the Wildflower Center by giving a gift of and annual membership.

Benefits include:
- free admission
- award-winning newsletter
- discounts in Wild Ideas: The Store and the catalog
- member prices for events and classes.

To give the gift of Wildflower Center membership, mail
this form with your check for a $25 Individual or $35
Household Membership. To find out about higher levels
of support (with even greater benefits), call the
Membership Office at (512) 292-4200 ext. 126.

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**Please enter an annual membership for:**

| Name: | 
| Address: | 
| City/State/ZIP: | 
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**Gift Membership:** If you are giving this membership as a gift, please fill in the information below.

| Donor Name: | 
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| Phone: | 

- Make your check payable to: NWRC
- Mail to: Membership, National Wildflower Research Center,
  Box 149187, Austin, TX 78714-9934

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The Wildflower Center is a member of Earth Share of Texas.

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**Grow Native!**

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