



L to r, green milkweed, Turk's cap, Gulf muhly and prairie blazing star have deep roots in Texas history.

HOUSTON'S EARLY-SETTLEMENT FLORA CAN GUIDE PLANTING OF YOUR NATIVE GARDEN

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Many people see the "wild and natural" disappearing around them and want to "grow native", but have problems finding their inspirational "seed" to get them started with native plant gardening.



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One suggestion is to literally take pages out of history from the writings of early settlers, travelers and naturalists that documented their experiences in our prairies, forests and riparian bottomlands. You can derive your inspiration from their observations.

In early-settlement times, most villages and other settlements on Buffalo, Braes and White Oak Bayou were in a forest wilderness. In 1840, early Houston-resident [George Bonnell](#) wrote about this area as being a virgin forest with "pine, oak, ash, hickory, mulberry, and cypress trees." If you need a tree for your "nativescape", what Bonnell saw can give you direction. A good start is to go with our hardy and wildlife-friendly native oaks like the Bur, Nuttall and Swamp Chestnut Oaks.

In the 1830s, naturalist [Thomas Drummond](#) traveled west from Galveston exploring riparian regions of the Texas river bottomlands. There, he found Turk's Cap, a highly versatile spreading shrub with bright-red, hibiscus-like flowers. It handles sun, shade, wet and dry, and can fit into your native landscape as a tall shrub, or shortened to a hedge of multiple plants, or trimmed down to a tall ground cover.

[Arthur Ikin](#) and [Ferdinand Roemer](#) came to our region in the 1840s and archived observations of native prairies and wildflowers. Ikin expressed, "In spring and summer, the whole country, hill, wood and prairie presents the appearance of a vast flower garden." Roemer wrote of the breathtaking vastness of the Texas prairies calling them "oceans of grass" with "tall grass covering the flat surface as far as the eye can see".

Unfortunately, less than 1 percent of the once nine million acres of coastal prairie from Ikin's and Roemer's day remains. However, a rare place like nearby 51-acre [Deer Park Prairie](#) offers local gardeners a palette of native gardening ideas. Over 300 varieties of native plants and grasses have grown there since settlement times. Some of these legacy species include: grassy plants like Little Blue Stem, Gulf Muhly and Cherokee Sedge; colorful forbs like Blue Mistflower, Prairie Blazing Star, Texas Coneflower, Missouri Ironweed, and Swamp Sunflower; Green Milkweed; and woody plants like Wax Myrtle. [Click here](#) for a list of native plant species in the Deer Park Prairie.