



*L to R: Gulf vervain, Lanceleaf coreopsis, Missouri ironweed
and Sideoats grama. All Photos by Don Verser*

Houston Audubon's Natives Nursery Provides Unique, "Real-Deal" Native Plants

By Anna Vallery

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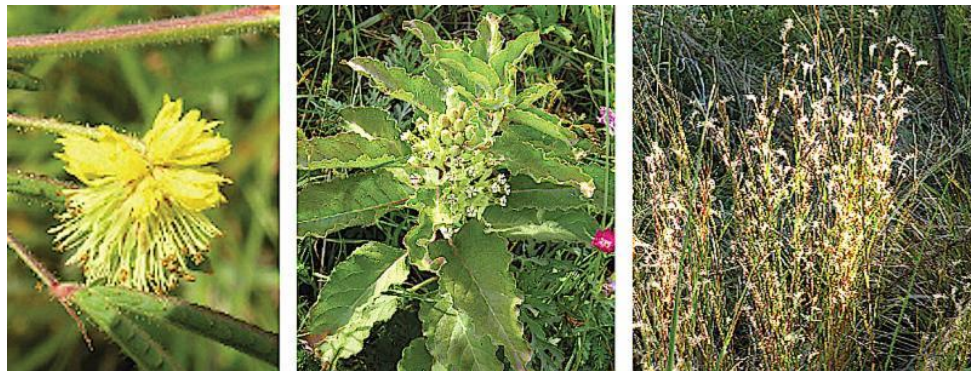
At Houston Audubon we believe every greenspace counts. Urban restoration projects can only transform so much of the city into usable habitat for wildlife. The Bird-Friendly Yard program aims to use other available urban landscape, specifically lawns, as wildlife habitat.

The first step of creating a Bird-Friendly Yard is planting native plants. Houston Audubon's Natives Nursery fills the need for these "real-deal" native plants. "Real-deal" refers to the fact that all the plants in the nursery are native to Harris County and are grown from locally collected seed, mostly from native prairie remnants around Houston. These plants are never treated with pesticides and are ready to take on anything Houston will throw at them. They are drought tolerant, flood-tolerant, heat-resistant, and cold-hardy.

Over 60 species of native plant are grown at the Natives Nursery, many of which are well-loved by native plant gardeners. Katy Prairie Conservancy recently released its "Nine Natives" list, which includes some wonderful plants for yards, including Gulf Muhly, Indianblanket, and Lemon Beebalm.

The Natives Nursery not only grows these species, but some lesser-used species that can serve as wonderful and wildlife-friendly additions to your garden. This list is a great mix of real-deal natives that can bring diversity and color to your yard throughout the year.

- Lanceleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*) - One of a few native forbs that doesn't die back in the winter, Lanceleaf coreopsis provides lovely green foliage all year. The yellow blooms appear in the spring and are popular for visiting pollinators.
- Tropical puff (*Neptunia pubescens*) - A member of the pea family, Tropical puff is an excellent nitrogen-fixer and ground-cover, improving soil quality. The leaves of Tropical Puff are sensitive, closing up when touched or disturbed. The flowers are bright yellow puffs that bloom from spring to fall.
- Gulf vervain (*Verbena xutha*) - Flowers of this species are small, light purple, and display on tall slender spikes from spring to fall.



L to R: Tropical puff, Zizotes milkweed and little bluestem

- Missouri ironweed - Missouri ironweed is pollinator favorite. Its bright purple flowers bloom in fall and attract bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects.



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- Zizotes milkweed -The flower of this species is different from other milkweeds as they are long, slender as opposed to short, and clumped. Like other milkweeds, Zizotes milkweed is a host plant for Monarch butterflies.
- Little bluestem - Smaller than true Bluestems, this species has slender, blue-green stems that turn a beautiful red color in the fall. During the winter, the seed heads turn white and provide food for many different bird species.
- Sideoats grama - Sideoats grama is the Texas state grass and a small, bird-friendly grass to add to your yard or garden. This species forms 2-3 ft. tall bunches that form seeds on one side of the stem.

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The new HAS nursery is now open only Friday mornings 8-10am at HAS' Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary, 440 Wilchester. (Volunteers are welcome, contact Anna at avallery@houstonaudubon.org)