

About

This booklet is the first in a series of the explorations of plants throughout Little Rock, Arkansas. In all of these booklets you'll find plants that I've identified while walking through the downtown area of the city. Each spread contains the plant's scientific name, common names, and useful information such as cultural significance, identifying features, medicinal history, and planting care.

While I created this guide mostly for myself, I hope it will inspire others to take a closer look at some of the plants growing in urban environments. I'm further using my findings from these daily walks to study the relationship between homeowners and native plants in homes and gardens. The last statement on each page is about whether or not the plant is native to not only North America, but specifically Arkansas.

Little Rock is located in a region of the southeast known as the West Gulf Coastal Plain. It's part of one of the most ecologically diverse regions in North America. In fact, the southeast has more species of tree than the entirety of Europe! The West Gulf Coastal Plain was, at one point, covered by the Gulf of Mexico. This left deeps beds of limestone, chalk, sandstone, and shale. Due to some of the washout from the Ouachita Mountains, the soil in this area tends to be sandy.

Magnolia
grandiflora



Southern Magnolia
Evergreen Magnolia
Loblolly Magnolia
Great Laurel Magnolia
Big Laurel
Bull Bay

A popular ornamental tree, the Southern Magnolia is known for its evergreen leaves and big, fragrant, white flowers. This tree can reach heights greater than 100 ft. It has smooth, dark-green leathery leaves that are alternate and 5-10 inches long. Often, they have a brown dust on the underside of the leaves. Creamy-white, 8 inch flowers adorn the ends of branches in the summer and fall. After falling, the flowers are replaced with cone-like seedpods.

When planting a Southern Magnolia, choose a spot with partial shade and access to a good water supply. The water in the area should be relatively dry. It's a fast growing, shade tree so keep in mind it will be difficult to plant anything underneath it. You'll also want to prune your magnolia after it bloom during the growing season since they don't easily heal. They are cold tolerant and mostly pest free.

While mostly used in landscape design, the southern magnolia has been used in aromatics, floral arrangements, and it's wood for furniture and cabinet work. Magnolias are actually closely related to bay trees and thus their leaves can be used as a replacement in cooking recipes. In traditional medicine, magnolia bark was used for headaches, depression, and anxiety. It's flower buds were often used to treat runny noses, sore throats, nausea, and other symptoms of the common cold.

The Southern Magnolia is native to North America, specifically states south and southeast of Arkansas.



Lablab purpureus

Purple Hyacinth Bean

Indian Bean

Egyptian Bean

Tonga Bean

LabLab

Tobacco Vine

The most eye-catching plant in my neighborhood, the purple hyacinth bean is a showy vine with shades of purple in the leaves, stems, flowers, and seed pods. It grows quickly and is a great choice for quick cover. The flowers bloom in the late summer and resemble sweet peas. Sadly, they lack fragrance. They are followed up by glossy purple pods of peas!

The purple hyacinth bean needs full sun and well draining soil. More sun means more flowers! It's a tropical plant so you'll want to plant it in warmer regions. Purple hyacinth beans also like a lot of water.





This plant is popular with many types of butterflies. They'll often lay their eggs on the leaves and you'll get cute little caterpillars for a while. The entirety of this plant is edible to us too! You can use both the leaves and the flowers in salads for a pop of color. While the beans and seed pods are edible, its best to leave those alone as incorrect preparation can lead to vomiting and convulsions.

It is not native to North America, but it's also not considered invasive. The purple bean hyacinth comes from tropical Africa.

Nadina domestica

Heavenly Bamboo

Sacred Bamboo

Nadina

Chinese Sacred Bamboo

Nadina is an ornamental shrub known for its bright red berries and beautiful, dark green leaves that turn a deep purple over the winter. It grows up to 8 ft tall and around 4 ft wide. In spring, this bush is adorned with tiny white flowers that are rich in nectar. You'll attract all sorts of pollinators with a Nadina. It's native to Japan, China, and India where it is commonly found in ravines, valleys, and warmer parts of the country.

You'll want to plant your Nadina in an area with partial shade and well draining soil. It is very hardy and drought tolerant. Nadinas make great shrub borders, woodland gardens, and informal hedges. They're also low maintenance and generally pest free! Do not eat the fruit or the leaves of the Nadina. It is not only toxic to people but many other animals such as livestock, cats, and dogs. All parts of the Nadina contain hydrocyanic acid and nandinenine. Its fruit specifically contains cyanide.

Nadina Domestica is not native to North America. Actually, it tends to be invasive in parts of the southeaster U.S. Please plant with care.





Hedera
helix



English Ivy
Common Ivy
European Ivy

This evergreen vine has an amazing history in many cultures. To the Greeks and Romans, it was sacred to Dionysus. Pagan druids believed the plant to represent female divinity. They even created the song 'The Holly and The Ivy' to represent this idea.

English Ivy is a woody vine that can act as both ground and wall cover. Along the ground, it can reach 8 inches in height. With the help of a wall or trellis, the plant can reach up to 80 ft. English Ivy does flower, but they are small and not noticeable. These plants are pretty versatile. They prefer partial shade or full shade as well as more moist soil. Given the right conditions, English Ivy is an aggressive grower. You can even keep this plant indoors, although it tends to be more finicky than most people expect.

Be warned that English Ivy is poisonous for cats, dogs, humans, and livestock. Contact with the sap can cause severe skin irritation. Eating any part of the plant can induce vomiting, drooling, hallucinations, diarrhea, and fever. English Ivy can host a variety of pests and diseases. Aphids and spider mites love to nibble on the plant. Leaf spot (xanthomonas) and root rot are also common ailments. The only treatment for these is to remove the infected plant entirely.

English Ivy is native to Europe, Scandinavia, and Russia. It is considered invasive in much of the US. Please contact a local extension office before planting to confirm that it's not invasive in your area.



Lamium purpureum

Red Deadnettle

Purple Deadnettle

Purple Archangel

The red deadnettle is a surprisingly pretty weed. The globulous leaves are green at the bottom of the stem and turn purple towards the top. They're also slightly hairy. It's flowers are a bright reddish purple and the red deadnettle can bloom year round. They can get anywhere from 2 inches tall to over 2 feet tall.

Though named a deadnettle, this plant is not related to nettles and does not sting. When they're young, you can actually eat the tops and leaves of the red deadnettle in a salad or a stir-fry.





You can find the red deadnettle growing almost anywhere. However, they prefer full sun and moist soil. This means they're very common in fields, ditches, drainage canals, gardens, and nursery plots. Very few pests or diseases bother the red deadnettle.

The red deadnettle's flower attracts honeybees and bumblebees as well as flies. It is commonly confused with Henbit, a very similar looking weed.

Red Deadnettle is not native to North America. All of this species comes from parts of Europe and Asia. In some cases, the plant can be considered invasive.

Taraxacum officinale

Common Dandelion

Blowball

Faceclock

Bitterwort

Cankerwort

Lions Tooth

Even without their bright yellow flowers, Dandelions are easily recognizable by their long, lobed, and toothed leaves. When you break open one of the hollow stems, you'll find a milky sap. The word 'Dandelion' comes from the French name for this plant 'dent de lion' which translates to lions tooth.

Dandelions, like most other plants, are grown through seeds. However, unlike many other plants, the dandelion forms a fruit called a cypdrlae. This 'fruit' is the fluffy, white ball that many kids blow on to make a wish. Dandelions primarily flower in the spring, but if the conditions are right you can see pretty yellow flowers in the fall too.

Each plant can live for 5-10 years and reach up to 20 inches across! Dandelions have one, long, unbranching tap root. This makes them easy to remove if you don't like Dandelions. But I suggest you keep them around as they have many uses beyond pretty flowers. You can actually make wine, salads, jellies, and more! If you bake and grind that tap root, it can act as a coffee substitute. Medicinally, the root is a diuretic and the sap is a mosquito repellent.

Dandelions are not native to North America. They come from parts of Europe and Asia. In some states, it's considered an invasive species.





Medicago arabica



Red Spotted Clover
Heart Clover
Spotted Medic
Spotted Burclover
Heart Trefoil

Though its common name suggests the Spotted Medic is part of the clover family, it's not even related. It's actually more closely related to beans and peas. They have broader, heart shaped leaves with a noticeable reddish brown dot in the middle. The flowers of the Spotted Medic tend to be small and yellow. The tiny fruits are prickly.

Spotted medic is often used in fields for foraging livestock. It often forms a symbiotic relationship with *Sinorhizobium Medicae*, a bacteria that restores nitrogen to the soil. You can also find Spotted Medic along roadsides, grasslands, turf, and along the edges of forests.

Spotted medic prefers full sun and moist soil, but its a versatile plant that can grow almost anywhere. This plant is not native to North America and comes from Southern Europe, specifically the Mediterranean region. It is not considered an invasive species but consider planting something native such as Patridgeberry, American Wisteria, and Trumpet Creepers.



Juniperus virginiana L.

Eastern Redcedar

Red Cedar

Red Cedars can grow quite high, the largest ever recorded reaching nearly 80 ft tall. They belong to the juniper family and are easily identified by their dull blue fruit that grows in the summer and fall.

The bark of the red cedar tends to be thin, reddish brown. You can peel it off in shred like strips. The leaves are classified as needles. However, you'll often find 2 variations on one tree. The first one is dark green, small, and scale like. You'll find 4 of these on one stem. The other variant happens on younger sprouts. They tend to be sharper, spreading, and can often have a white tint to them.





Red Cedars have many uses; lead pencils, fence posts, furniture, canoes, interior finishing, and just as ornamentation.

They grow best in full sun and is drought tolerant. It can grow in almost any soil You'll find that many birds love nesting in Red Cedars, but the fruit is eaten almost exclusively by cedar waxwings.

It is native to North America and Arkansas. Red Cedar fossils have been found dating back to aboriginal America.

Narcissus jonquilla





Daffodil
Narcissus
Jonquil

A wonderful sign of spring, these bright yellow flowers pop up as soon as the weather starts getting warmer. There are many variations of the Daffodil made through cross breeding. You can find them in yellow, white, and even orange with anywhere from 1 to 20 flowers per stem.

A very tolerant plant, Daffodils should be planted in the fall in soil that is well drained but moist. They grow in shade and full sun. They'll even create 'daughter' bulbs over time that result in little clumps of Daffodils. As the flowers fade, you'll want to clip off the dead heads so the plant has a chance to bloom again.

Daffodils are resistant to both deer and rodents. They can be toxic to pets though, so be careful when planting! Several varieties of mites, flies, and slugs like to snack on the plant too so you may have to take precautions against these.

These beautiful flowers are not native to North America. Daffodils originate in Spain and Portugal. They are not invasive, but you may want to consider planting native species of flowers instead.

Liquidambar styraciflua

Sweet Gum

American Sweetgum

American Storax

Hazel Pine

Bilsted

Redgum

Satin Walnut

Star-leaved Gum

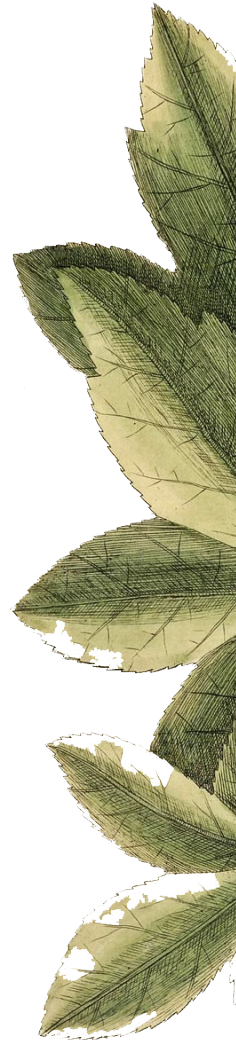
Alligatorwood

Sweetgum is a popular ornamental tree easily recognized by its star shaped leaves (with 5 points) and spiky fruits. Its also a main export for lumber from the United States. The sap was originally used by the Mayans as an incense or a balm. Just as the name suggests, Sweetgum sap was also used to make gum!

The Sweetgum grows mostly in the southeastern parts of the United States as it prefers warmer weather. However you can find it in other temperate parts of the world. It also tolerates a variety of soils, even poor drainage, but prefers full sun. Many different varieties of the Sweetgum have eared the Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society too.

Sweetum is susceptible to leaf parasites and fungi known to cause leaf spots. Environmental stress and herbicides can also harm this tree so be careful when spraying for weeds.

Native to North America and Arkansas specifically, 3 million year old fossils of a closely related ancestor have been found in Alaska, Greenland, and Europe.





Quercus velutina

Black Oak

Eastern black oak

Yellow Oak

Black oaks tend to be some of the smaller oaks that you'll find, especially in the north. They range from 60 to 80 ft but can reach up to nearly 140 ft. Easily identified by their leaves, black oaks have 5-7 points on their leaves separated by deep u-shapes. These turn beautiful shades of red and orange in the fall.

If you peel back the bark of a black oak, you'll find a bright yellow-orange pigment. Back in the 1940s, it was used as a dye and sold commercially in Europe. Another identifier of a black oak is its acorns. This won't necessarily tell it apart from other oak trees. If you're looking to grow an oak, start your seedling in a cool, moist soil with either a silty clay or loam base. Generally, you want to plant so it's getting sun on an east or north sloped hill.

Oak trees suffer from a variety of diseases and pests. Oak wilt, a common problem in the eastern U.S., is spread by sap feeding beetles and oak bark beetles. Shoe string root rot is also another problem. However, this is unlikely to kill a healthy tree. Leaf blister, powdery mildew, cankers, leaf spots, and oak-pine rust are a few other diseases you might find on a black oak. Many tunneling insects and leaf eaters also enjoy this tree. Carpenter worms, borers, timber beetles, and the gypsy moth are common.

The black oak and many other oak trees are native to North America and Arkansas specifically. They are not considered an invasive species.

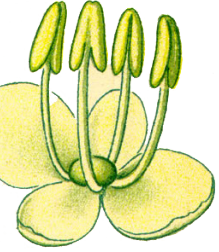




Buxus microphylla



Boxwood
Winter Gem Boxwood
Littleleaf Boxwood
Littleleaf Box



A small, round evergreen shrub, Boxwood has several variations including Compacta and Japonica. It's max height is roughly 6.5 ft. This makes it perfect for hedges, shrubs borders, or foundation plants. Boxwood is also very tolerant to pruning, so feel free to take a clipping home to propagate.

The Winter Gem Boxwood specifically can be identified it's small, rounded green leaves (sometimes notched at the top) that grow opposite each other. You can also sometimes find white, cottony down on the stems. The Compacta Boxwood has a similar likeness and you can find it used in topiary and bonsai.

Plant your boxwood in moist, well-drained soil with partial shade. While it can grow in full shade, your Boxwood might become a bit leggy. Once it's established, you don't need to worry about many things as boxwood is drought, rabbit, nematode, and deer resistant. The only pests you'll have to worry about are Boxwood mites and leaf miners. These will only harm unhealthy plants.

No varieties of Boxwood are native to Arkansas or North America. They originate from Southern Europe, Northern Africa, and Western Asia. They aren't toxic, but it's not recommended to eat any part of this plant.

Ilex opaca

American Holly

White Holly

Prickly Holly

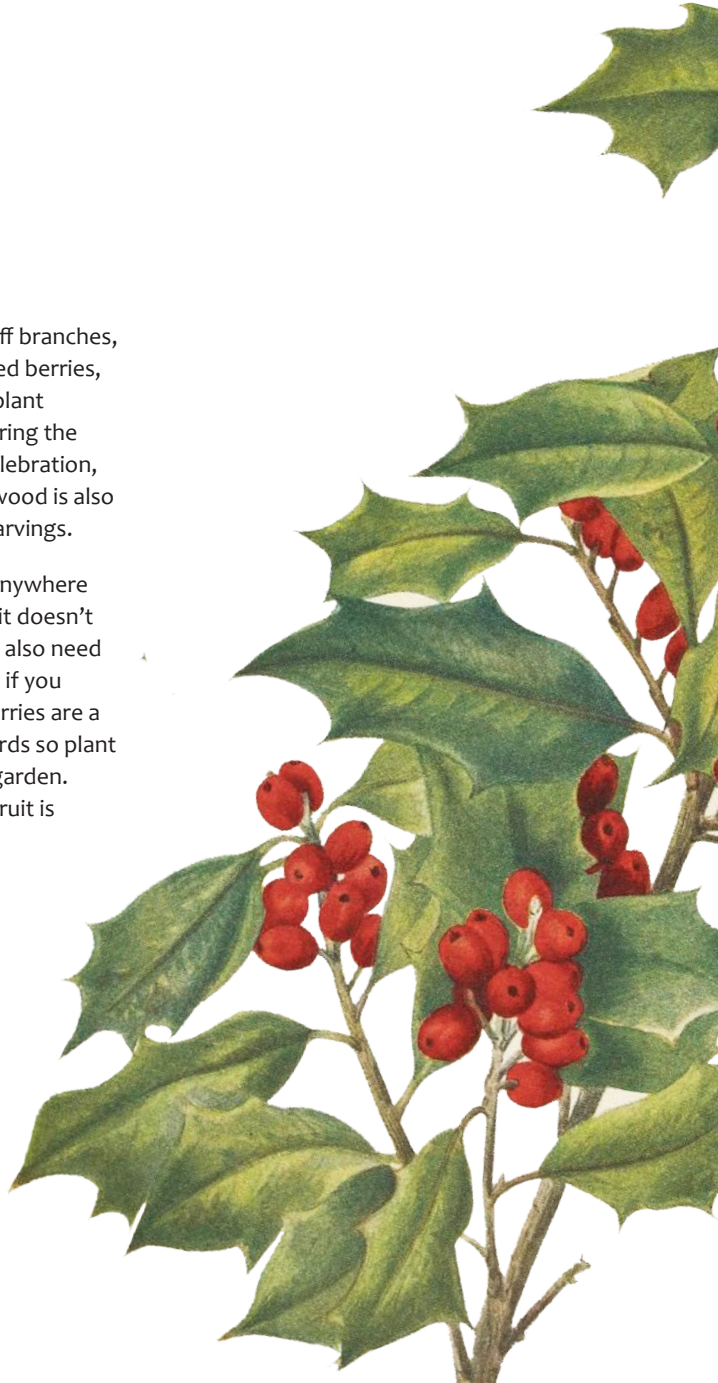
Evergreen Holly

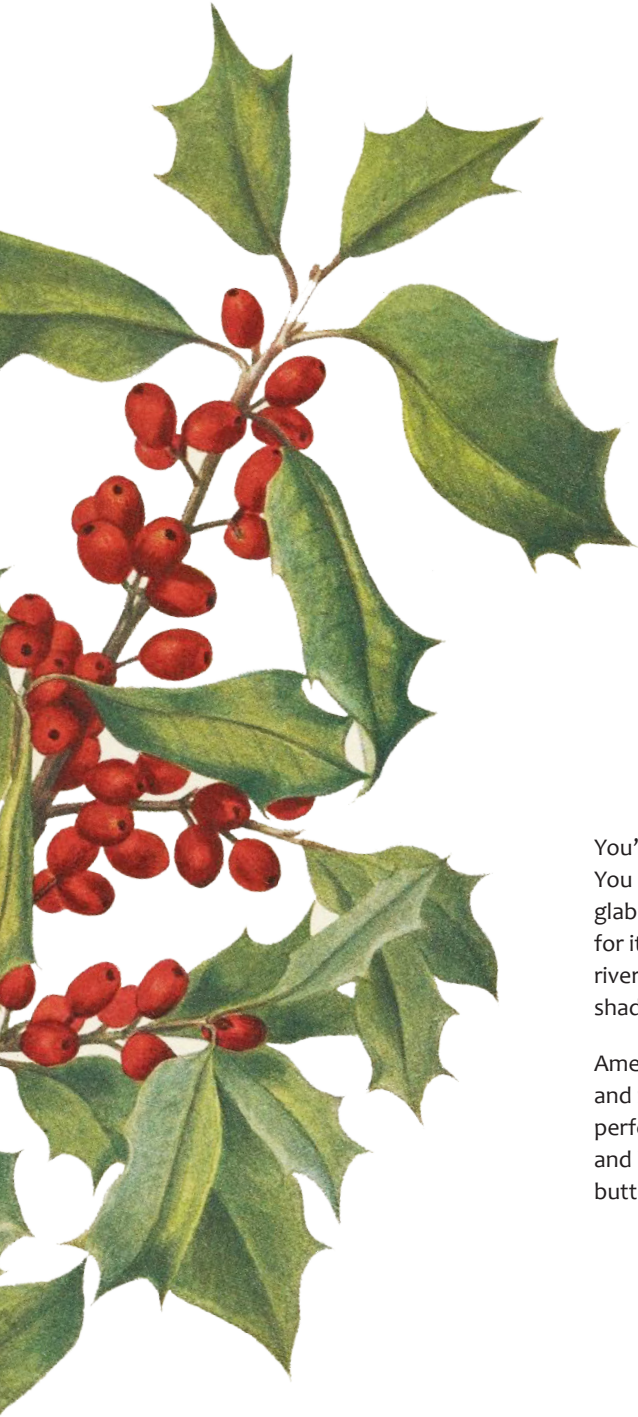
Christmas Holly

Yule Holly

Easily recognizable from its stiff branches, slick green leaves, and bright red berries, the American Holly is a classic plant that often graces doorways during the holidays. When not used for celebration, it's a popular ornamental. Its wood is also good for inlays, handles, and carvings.

The American Holly can grow anywhere from 25 to 60 ft tall. However, it doesn't reach this height quickly. You'll also need both a male and a female plant if you want berries. The bright red berries are a popular snack for many songbirds so plant them if you're planning a bird garden. However, be warned that the fruit is poisonous to humans.





You'll find American Holly is an evergreen. You can identify its simple, smooth, glabrous leaves any time of the year. Look for it in the shade of other trees and along riverbanks. American Holly prefers a bit of shade and moist well drained soil.

American Holly is native to North America and more specifically, Arkansas. It's the perfect shrub to plant in native gardens and habitats. It is also the host Henrys Elfin butterfly's larvae.

Sources

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