



April 15, 2019

## Bluebonnet: The Rockstar of Texas

By David Bickerstaff

Welcome to the rock star of the Texas flowers, the bluebonnet. The bluebonnet is not only the official state flower, it also has other official designations:

- Bluebonnet Tartan- Tartan refers to fabric woven into plaid patterns which represent clans, families or regions in Scotland
- Bluebonnet Song
- Bluebonnet City (Ennis, Texas)
- Bluebonnet Festival (Chappell Hill Bluebonnet Festival) - Chappell Hill is located northwest of Houston (close to Brenham).
- and Bluebonnet Trail (also in Ennis)- over 40 miles of mapped driving Bluebonnet Trails



The bluebonnet, *Lupinus subcarnosus*, (commonly called 'buffalo clover' at the time) was designated as the state flower back in 1901. The designation as the state flower was achieved after a heavy debate against the cotton ball and cactus. The National Society of Colonial Dames of America in Texas championed the bluebonnet designation. On and off for the next 70 years a debate ensued over the designation. Some people thought that the variety selected was the least attractive variety of the Texas bluebonnets. In 1971 the legislature included the *Lupinus texensis* and 'any other variety of bluebonnet not heretofore recorded'.

The bluebonnet is in the legume or pea family of plants. There are at least six species of bluebonnets growing in Texas (all of which are included in the state flower designation), two of which are found growing naturally in Texas and no other place in the world.

### Texas Wildflowers

Shortly after the Texas Highway Department was organized in 1917, officials noted that wildflowers were among the first vegetation to reappear at roadside cuts and fills. In 1932, the department hired its first landscape architect, to maintain, preserve and encourage wildflowers and other native plants along rights of way. Today, they purchase and sow about 30,000 pounds of wildflower seeds each year.

Is it illegal to pick bluebonnets? No. This is a common myth and while it is discouraged, it is not illegal.

## **Germinating Bluebonnets**

Fall is the time to plant bluebonnet seeds to have flowers next spring. In nature, bluebonnet seeds germinate in September and/or October during the fall rains. Since the seed pods are very hard, you should purchase acid scarified seed to assure a high germination rate. Acid scarified seeds are briefly soaked in acid to soften the seed coat. Properly scarified bluebonnet seeds will germinate within 10 days after planting in a moist soil. It is essential that you have good seed to soil contact. Hand broadcasting is the simplest seeding method and then press the seeds into the soil or walk over the area.

In non-irrigated areas, plant wildflowers in full sun where you do not need to mow until the seeds mature and drop. The seed pods will burst open and the seeds fall to the ground several weeks after the flowers fade, or collect and store the seeds to plant in the fall.

As a general rule, you don't need to fertilize your bluebonnets and may result in leggy plants with more leaves than blooms. Mow the area six to eight weeks after flowering which will allow the plants to reseed for next year.

*For more information, call 903-675-6130, email [hendersonCMGA@gmail.com](mailto:hendersonCMGA@gmail.com), or visit [txmq.org/hendersonmq](http://txmq.org/hendersonmq).*