Celebrating Life in the Chihuahuan Desert

Hours of Operation:
Hours listed below will begin on April 14, 2021. Visit our website for more information.

· Centennial Museum
  Wednesday through Friday
  10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.

· Chihuahuan Desert Gardens
  Open every day
  Dawn to Dusk

· Lhakhang
  Closed until further notice
Welcome
Daniel Carey-Whalen, Director

Mark your calendars! Spring is here and that means it is time for our “annual” native plant sale, FloraFest! I say “annual” in quotes, because as many of you know, we were unable to host FloraFest last year for the first time in over 20 years due to the pandemic. But now, with staff and volunteers vaccinated and UTEP’s safety protocols in place, we are ready to invite everyone back onto campus this April 17 and 18. Before you visit, we encourage you to read our Botanical Curator, Kevin Floyd’s article about the importance of native plants, not only for your garden but the entire ecosystem.

The Centennial Museum will once again open its doors to the public starting April 14, with the opening of our newest exhibit, Into the Great White Sands. Come see the photographs from this amazing exhibit and be inspired to get out into nature, and even take some photos yourself. In this edition, Sam Winer and Amy Briones give us the low-down on the layout, walking us through what it takes to install such an exhibit. Starting on April 14th, we will only be open Wednesday through Friday from 10am to 3pm, but please check our website and social media as our future hours may change.

Yet, before FloraFest and the Into the Great White Sands exhibit commence, the Centennial Museum is partnering with the College of Liberal Arts and the Division of Student Affairs to host this year’s Bhutan Days festival from April 6 thru April 9. As our Education Curator, Claudia Ley explains, there are several virtual and in-person events the public can attend. We look forward to welcoming people back to campus to visit the Lhakhang, which will be open on Wednesday, April 7 and Friday, April 9 from 11am to 1pm.

We hope you take the time to get outside this spring and visit the UTEP campus. Wear your mask, stay physically distant, and we will provide the hand sanitizer. Hope to see you soon.

Daniel Carey-Whalen
“This photo exhibition has over 50 photographs, however due to size constrains we can only show around 30 images.”

contribute to the story. Curation, or making decisions on how to tell that story, is very subjective. What works for one curator might not work for another. The lack of space for this exhibit strongly influenced my curation as I had a list of almost 20 images that would not fit. A photograph might end up on the list for various reasons: the size might not fit, there might be a similar, often more appealing, image that tells the story, or it just does not feel right. With Sketchup I can also figure out the spacing between the photos. There is no doubt that this software makes curating exhibits a lot easier.

Sketchup allows me to create a digital rendering that I can use to easily adjust the flow of the exhibit. I can change the photos, photo placement,
When getting ready to install an exhibit there is some prep work involved for the gallery space. Depending on the exhibit that work can change. Here is an example of preparing for a photo exhibition:

The walls need to be cleaned and prepared for the new exhibit. This means taking out previous nails and tape from the walls. There may be scuffs and marks as well. These need to be cleaned up before a new coat of paint is added, so the walls will not stain. A damp cloth and an eraser will do the trick for scuffs. After this, the holes from the nails need to be patched with joint compound. The compound needs a day to dry fully before sanding it down. The sanding will leave some powder that needs to be cleaned off the wall.

Next, we move to painting. First, we lay out tarps, so we do not damage our floors. Clean rollers work best, so the paint can be applied cleanly and evenly, however well-washed rollers often suffice. I have five-gallon buckets that I dump 1 or 2 gallons of paint into. It has a wire grid in it to wipe off extra paint from the roller. This is much easier than paint trays that must be refilled more frequently. When I am finished, and since all the paint is water soluble, I thoroughly clean the bucket for the next time we paint. We allow a day for the paint on the walls to dry.

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Now we place the framed images on the floor based on where their position on the wall is going to be. The curator will have a layout for me with measurements and positions of the photos. Once I get the photos laid out, I start measuring. Usually items go at midline, but that could change depending on the exhibit. Midline means the middle of the photo is at eye level. When the picture hangs from the back (with a wire running the length of the frame) alterations in measurements need to be considered.

Once measurements are completed, I start hammering in the nails to hang the photos. If each photo is evenly spaced apart, I make a piece of matte board to that size to use throughout the exhibit. It is much faster than using a ruler every time. I will use a level to make sure each photo is straight and go through all the photos one more time once they are all up. Finally, each photo has an identification (ID) label, in addition to other text panels for the exhibit, that need to be installed. We measure a small distance from the photo to the ID label and use that measurement throughout the exhibit.

That is the basics for exhibition prep.
**Bhutan Days 2021: A Virtual and In-Person Celebration**

Claudia Ley, Educational Curator

After an unexpected year, we are now starting to see life return to campus. I often find myself counting my blessing for being a part of UTEP and having access to on-campus COVID-19 testing and vaccinations. I know this has been a relief for many of us who have been fortunate enough to receive these resources, as it allows us to begin to look forward to meeting up with friends, going to our favorite restaurants, and visiting our beloved museums. And while the University and other cultural institutions begin to open their doors to the public, the Centennial Museum is also working on opening its doors to visitors starting with the Lhakhang Cultural Exhibit.

The Centennial Museum will reopen the Lhakhang to visitors for UTEP’s Bhutan Days Celebration happening April 6-9, 2021. This virtual and in-person celebration will be like no other Bhutan Days celebration with insightful discussions and presentations, including a film screening and in-person tours and a virtual tour of the Lhakhang. On Tuesday, April 6, dance journalist, Karen Greenspan will explore Bhutan’s culture through dance, utilizing a multimedia presentation featuring video recordings of Bhutanese dances from the New York Public Library Dance Division’s extensive Bhutan Dance Project, in addition to photos taken by her at Bhutan’s sacred festivals.

Museum staff will lead in-person tours of the Lhakhang that Wednesday and Friday. We will follow all University COVID-19 protocols, including always wearing masks and maintaining 6 feet of social distancing. Visitors can learn more about Bhutanese art and culture through an in-person tour or through the newly designed virtual guide, which now features two newly augmented murals found inside the Lhakhang. Those who are not able to visit in person can still join us on Thursday for a virtual...an international award-winning Bhutanese film, moderated by On Film radio host Charles Horak. Finally, anyone taking part in these events have the chance to win Bhutanese-inspired goodie bags"
tour and talk with David Figueroa of Augment El Paso and creator of the Lhakhang 360 Virtual Tour and the augmented murals.

Later, on Thursday, April 8, there will be a screening of Kushuthara (2014), an international award-winning Bhutanese film, moderated by On Film radio host Charles Horak. Finally, anyone taking part in these events have the chance to win Bhutanese-inspired goodie bags and the autographed book, “Footfalls from the Land of Happiness: A Journey into the Dances of Bhutan” by Karen Greenspan.

It is our intention that this celebration brings a glimmer of hope and comfort as we begin to come back on campus to interact with colleagues and friends once again. For more information on the Bhutan Day’s Celebration happening this year and the Lhakhang Cultural Exhibition please make sure to follow our website and social media and share it with a friend.
Growing native plants in your yard provides many benefits. Although there is no single definition of what makes a plant native to an area, the general concept is that the plant species that evolved within an area are native. People often consider plants that have been brought into a region with European settlement to be non-native or exotic, but there really is no firm dividing line. We sometimes talk about using “native-adapted” plants in our landscapes. These species evolved in similar environmental conditions and tend to do well in our area. Native-adapted plants do have several of the same benefits as native plants, but with a few key differences that we will discuss.

Native plants are adapted to our environmental conditions, so typically require less water and fertilizer to maintain than exotic species. This saves you money and helps conserve precious resources, especially water. Water is always limiting in El Paso, but we are currently in the beginnings of what might be another megadrought.

Apache plume (*Fallugia paradoxa*) is a medium-sized shrub that provides interest to the garden for much of the year. In spring it produces flowers that look like old-fashioned roses, which makes sense as it is in the rose family. The flowers are replaced with pink feathery plumes with the seeds.

Tufted evening primrose (*Oenothera caespitosa*) is a short plant that produces masses of large white flowers. As the name suggests, the flowers open in the evening and close the next morning in most cases. In cooler or cloudy weather the flowers can stay open all day.
Agarito (*Mahonia trifoliolata*) has a special place in our gardens. It is an early spring bloomer, producing masses of sweet-smelling yellow flowers. As one of the first flowering shrubs, it is an important food source for the early emerging pollinators, include the metallic blue Currant Mason bee.

Blackfoot daisy (*Melampodium leucanthum*) forms a low mound around 6-12 inches tall. It can be covered with one inch wide white flowers that smell like honey.

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worse than anything since 1600. **Climate change models** predict warmer and drier conditions in the Southwest, so preparing now with drought-tolerant plants will future-proof your yard. Even the most drought-tolerant native plants will require supplemental irrigation when getting established, but many can survive just on rainfall after that. A little extra water, particularly during dry spells, will help them flourish in your yard. Native plants are also adapted to cold weather, like the freeze we had in February. Even with an unusual cold snap like that, many of the native plants in the Chihuahuan Desert Gardens survived and are looking great or are regrowing from the roots. Some of the exotic species used on campus are dead and not coming back.

One advantage that native plants have that native-adapted plants lack is fitting in with the broader ecological landscape. Native plants have co-evolved with the rest of the ecosystem, such as insects, birds, and mammals. Some species are specialist feeders, meaning that they can only feed on one or a few plant species. Perhaps the best-known example is the monarch butterfly, whose caterpillars can only feed on members of the milkweed genus. But many other butterflies and moths have similar requirements, as do some of our native bees. There are likely hundreds of species of native bees in our area, and some only collect pollen from a few species to provision their larva. If we do not consider feeding the insects in our yards,
there will not be food for many birds, lizards, and mammals. Landscaping with native plants helps to restore the connections between plants and animals, and repair some of the damage done to our environment.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to growing native plants is being able to buy them. Our locally owned nurseries do have some species available, but you will be lucky to find more than a few in the big box home improvement stores. This is one of the major reasons that we hold FloraFest each year, our native plant sale. This year it will be on April 17 and 18 on the UTEP campus. We are still working on ordering the plants, so I cannot tell you about all the great options we will have. We will be updating our plant sale website, florafest.org, as we are able to finalize the orders. Many of the plants that we will sell are not available locally. All the pictures that accompany this article are of plants that will be available at the sale. The plant sale is also the only fundraiser for the maintenance and operations of the gardens. We will be following all the important safety rules, such as requiring face coverings and spreading things out a bit more than usual. We are also looking for volunteers to help with the sale. Learn more and sign up on the website.

Native plants are a beautiful addition to any landscape. The wildlife they attract can provide hours of entertainment. And you can feel proud about helping restore our ecosystem, one plant at a time.

Mealy cup sage (Salvia farinacea) has dark blue tubular flowers that are a favorite of native digger bees and bumble bees. It will die back to the ground most winters but regrows quickly once temperatures warm up a bit. Ours in the gardens are just beginning to produce flower buds.

Gregg’s mistflower (Conoclinium greggii) is a must-have for the butterfly lover. The two-foot-tall plant is topped with small bluish-purple flower clusters that often have both Queen (pictured here) and Monarch butterflies getting nectar.
FLORAFEST
2021
native plant sale

APRIL 17 AND 18
9AM - 4PM
We might end early on Sunday if we sell out of plants.

Stop by the UGLC on the UTEP campus for the Region's Largest Plant Sale!

Visit our event page at www.florafest.org for more information.