

Nature Notes

October 3, 2019

A weekly round-up of useful information as you and your students explore the natural wonders around Nolan Catholic High School.

Question of the Week:

What is a homecoming mum and is it invasive?



A homecoming mum of the *Esto Dux* variety, developed by the author

Answer:

Homecoming mum (*Flore magna*) other common names: Hoco mum, mumstrosity

The homecoming mum is a cultivar of the chrysanthemum, a prolific and easy-to-grow flower that blooms profusely during the fall. The first homecoming mums were documented in Texas, in the early 1930's. The original homecoming mums were tiny, real flowers augmented with a few ribbons in school colors. This uniquely Texas variety, in an astounding example of expedited evolution, took only decades to grow from a small, unobtrusive corsage into the gargantuan, self-lit monstrosities seen on high school campuses throughout Texas today. The homecoming mum only blooms in the fall, requires little or no watering once established, and goes dormant immediately after the close of football season.

Those interested in obtaining homecoming mums can purchase cultivars native to their high school, or create their own from a variety of manmade materials. While some scientists have expressed concern that the gaudy homecoming mum will eventually take over high school campuses across America, so far its range is mostly limited to Texas, with a few outlying instances occurring in Oklahoma.

Along with the milkweed, we planted several Gregg's Mistflower plants in the courtyard gardens last week. These delicate flowers

Gregg's Mistflower

provide nectar for lots of butterfly and bee species, and as an added bonus, they should continue blooming later into the fall than most butterfly plants.

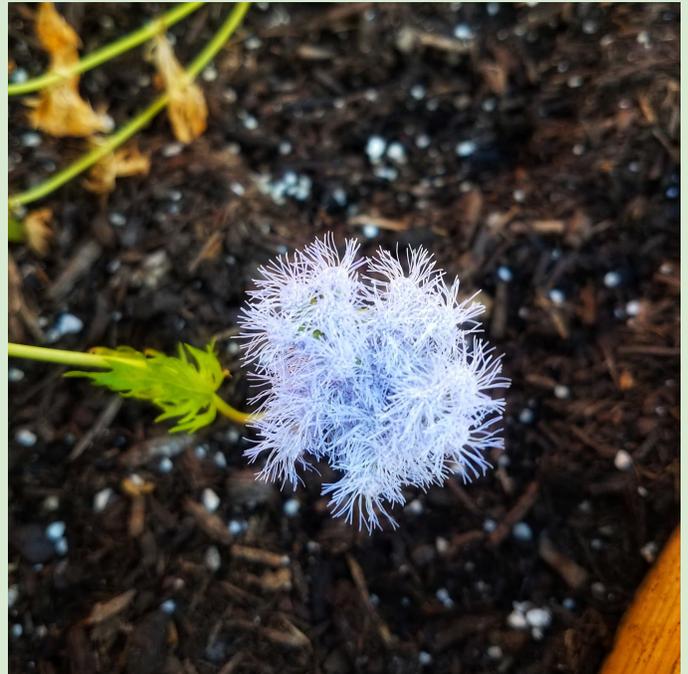
And lest we fall into the trap of thinking plant facts are only pertinent to the realm of science, I decided to explore a little bit about why this plant was scientifically named “Gregg.”

Josiah Gregg was born in Tennessee in 1806. He was sickly as a child, and as an adult, tuberculosis prevented him from studying law. Gregg joined a caravan headed to New Mexico, hoping the climate change would improve his health. It did, and he would traverse the plains four more times as a trader.

He documented all of his notes and observations along the way. He helped blaze the trail that would later assist adventurous souls headed to California during the Gold Rush. He published a book called *Commerce of the Prairies* in 1844. He died in 1850 after a fall from his horse. In honor of all of his work documenting plant species, more than 23 plants bear the scientific name “greggii.”

https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=cogr10

<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/josiah-gregg/>



Good Reads

A daily reflection from 365 days of Divine Mercy, drawing on imagery from creation

<https://divinemercy.life/2018/09/18/reflection-297-lessons-from-nature-2/>

Believe one who knows: You will find something greater in woods than in the books. Trees and stones will teach you that which you can never learn from masters.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

Courtyard Adventures

Several questions have arisen about our outdoor chalkboard. I'm keeping most of the markers in my office, so please let me know if you need them for your classes. If you want to remove markings from the chalkboard, please get some paper towels from the bathroom, dampen them thoroughly, and wipe down the chalkboard. I have not yet determined if Clorox wipes or other cleaners are safe on the board, so let's stick with water for the time being. Thank you for your help with this!

Please remind your students that they can use the courtyards during passing periods.

Remember, I'm available to help with activities and lesson plans if you want to get your students outside but don't know where to start. Email or come by my office anytime.

Where to find Emily next week

Monday 9:30-2

Tuesday 8:30-2

Wednesday 9:30-3:30

Thursday 8:30-4

ebreclaw@nchstx.org

Outdoor Learning Headquarters

In the office immediately to the left of the teacher boxes in room D22.

Please come by anytime! Let's chat about how we can work outdoor learning into your lesson plans!

Personal cell: 682-438-2393