

# June Plant of the Month

By Linn Cates

Gregg's Mistflower – *Conoclinium greggii*;  
before 2000 C.E.: *Eupatorium greggii*



With great anticipation of what is to come, I sighted the first Gregg's Mistflower blossom at the Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge Butterfly Garden on Sunday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>.



I had seen the first at Austin College's Idea Center Native Plants Garden 2 days earlier.



I check daily, but mine hasn't bloomed yet.



All this excited anticipation because what is to come is amazingly beautiful to behold. Gregg's Mistflower, to my mind, wins the prize for attracting beautiful butterflies like the Queens shown below.



Look for Gregg's Mistflower in the Hagerman NWR Butterfly Garden, but not on the trails. Gregg's Mistflower is native to areas in west and south Texas. Our native is Blue Mistflower, *Conoclinium coelestinum* which grows in East, Southeast and North Central Texas.

You will see many pollinator species on this plant; you might see a flock of Queens happily nectaring away during your visit to the garden. It is especially exciting to see the Monarchs nectaring on it in October on their amazing 3000-mile migration south each year.

While Gregg's Mistflower is not native to North Central Texas, it performs so nicely here in our Butterfly Garden setting that we have invited it in to stay. It's cousin, Blue MisfFlower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*), our region's native, stays in the fields at Hagerman. The Wasowskis caution about Blue Mist in *Native Texas Plants* writing that "one of these plants is usually enough" to invite into a garden.

## Identifying Gregg's Mistflower

Though you won't be needing to hone your ID skills to locate Gregg's Mistflower at Hagerman -- it is labelled in the Butterfly Garden -- you may encounter it in the wild on travels south and west. It grows on chalky, calcareous soils that get seasonally flooded. It grows to a height of 1-3 feet, usually 1 ½', and because it spreads readily by way of underground rhizomes, it will form a mat or colony and may have spread over vast areas if the moisture and sun conditions were conducive. The leaves are about 2" long and a little less wide, very cut out looking on the leaf margin, and arranged in pairs opposite one another along the stem. The bloom is made up of small purplish-blue flowers clustered together to form cushion like 2" flower heads. This plant tends to seek shade because of its preference for lightly moist soils so you most often encounter it in dappled shade in the wild. On the USDA Plants Database (<https://plants.sc.egov.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=COGR10>) you can zoom in on the range map for this plant to see its native range by county -- something I like to do as I'm learning about a native plant species.

I also like to glean all I can from the common and scientific names of species. Josiah Gregg (1806-1850) was an avid naturalist, who explored Texas and Mexico, in the 1840's, and then points west to California before he died. The American Botanical Society has added the Latin name "Greggi" to 23 species of plants in his honor. "Mist" in the name is thought to refer to the blurry look of the floescence. "*Conoclinium*" is from the Latin for "little cone-shaped bed."

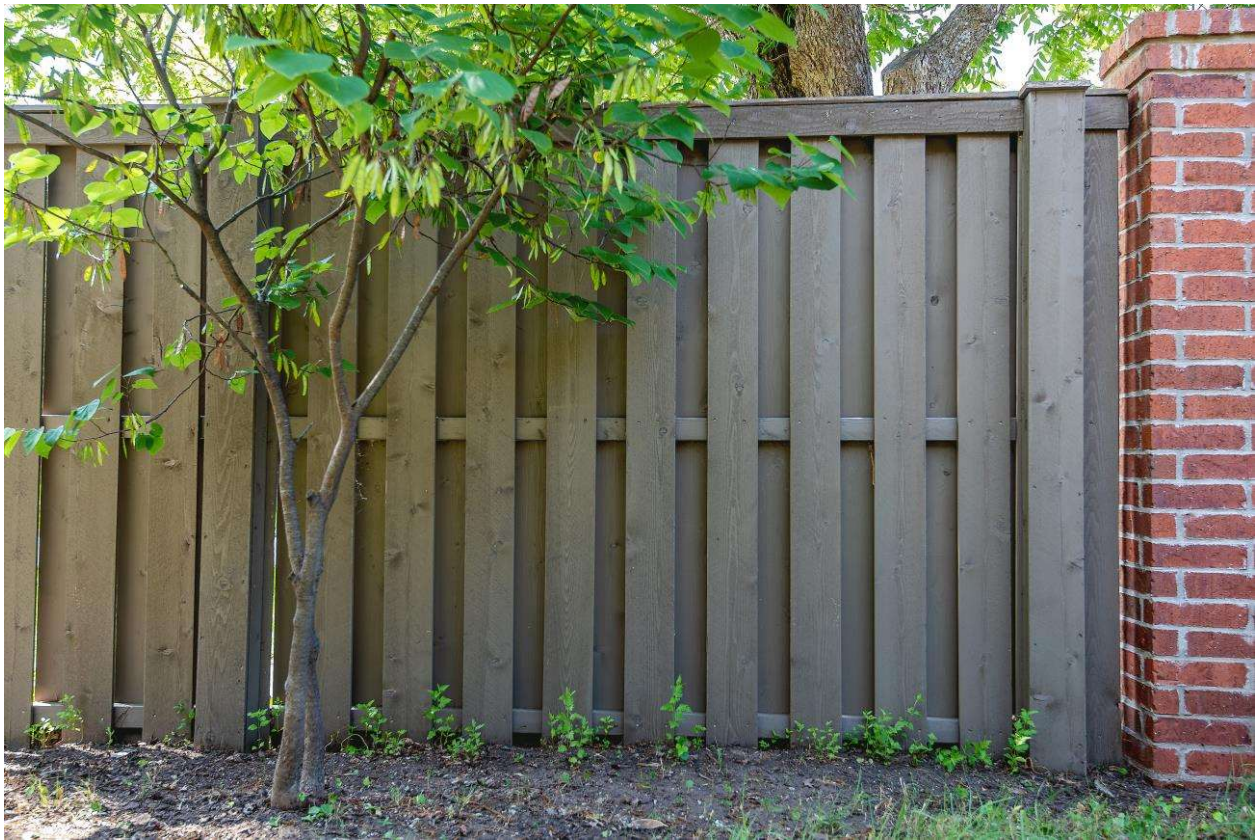
## Growing Gregg's Mistflower in Your Texoma Garden

I've enjoyed getting to know this plant over the years in different gardens, therefore in different growing conditions. Some of us gardeners will remember our own, very special plant person, Jesse Stephens who wrote a weekly column in the *Sherman Democrat* on gardening, published several garden related books, and ran a garden store called "The Backyard Nature Store" from which she also did landscape consulting.

In this capacity, Jesse planned a xeriscape landscape for the front garden of the Belden Street Montessori School where I taught. In choosing the perfect plant for a flower bed that bordered the benches where our preschoolers waited to be picked up after school, she chose Gregg's Mistflower. It was soft, in case a child fell into the flowers; short enough that the children could see over the plants

while sitting; and it was often covered in butterflies and other pollinators, so the children could watch nature and contemplate as they unwound after a busy school day. Perfect!, we decided, but our Gregg's Mistflower decided otherwise. It found the spot too sunny and over time it grew only in one small shadier triangular corner of the bed and eventually "walked," as Jesse described it, across the sidewalk to dappled shade under a newly planted redbud tree! We most likely could have kept the plant in our intended place had we met its water requirement; but alas this was a xeriscape landscape and we used a minimum of water in it.

Gregg's Mistflower spreads by underground stems or rhizomes, putting up new plants all along it or as in the case of the "walking" plant putting up new plants on the other side of the sidewalk. This growth pattern has led some gardeners to call it "aggressive." My observations in my garden, at HNWR Butterfly Garden, at Austin College's Idea Center Gardens, and even at the Montessori School garden indicate that it is easy to pull out any strays and that environmental factors, like shade and moisture, naturally limit expansion. And one benefit of this growth pattern is that it yields plants you may want to have in new garden areas. This photo shows plants that have walked under a fence, and I welcomed that.



You may want to share the rhizomes as new plants with friends and neighbors. I have tried directly transplanting and potting up for a while to establish more root hardiness before planting.



Both ways work! This my new Gregg's mist plot with both potted and directly transplanted individuals.



A couple of tips when including this plant in your space:

- It can be a filler around showier plants.
- Overwatering makes it more aggressive.

I am curious about the mist flower native to our area, *Conoclinium coelestinum* (*coelestinum* for “sky blue.”) I will be looking for it on walks in the area, and plan to invite one, maybe just one, into my garden. I have bought the seeds and will share. Any takers? This queen wants to know.





## References: World-wide Web

Denton County Master Gardener Association. Article on Gregg's Mist Flower. <https://dcmga.com/north-texas-gardening/perennials/master-gardener-favorites/greggs-mist-flower/>

Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center. [https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id\\_plant=cogr10](https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=cogr10) (plant profile for Gregg's Mist Flower)

Monarch Butterfly Gardens. <https://monarchbutterflygarden.net/> (Article on Gregg's Mist Flower. *Conoclinium greggii*)

US Department of Agriculture Plants Data Base.  
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## References: Books

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Wasowski, Sally and Andy Wasowski. 1997. *Native Texas Plants: Landscaping Region By Region*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

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