

The Signs of October

at the

Community Nature Center

of Prescott



*Goosefoot in Autumn Color
with Wright Buckwheat*

1980 Williamson Valley Road

Prescott. AZ

Welcome to the Community Nature Center! We hope you'll enjoy observing & contemplating the many wonders of this natural environment. To help us preserve this special place, **please stay on the trails, keep dogs leashed, pickup waste** and please leave native plants *and* animals undisturbed. Remember, footprints made on the fragile grassland & trailsides do not heal quickly in our dry environment!

Enjoy your visit and look for a new ***Signs of Winter*** in November.

HAVE YOU SEEN ...

... very **small, young lizards**? Fall brings newly hatched lizards to the Nature Center. Among them is the Plateau Fence Lizard; its juveniles can be found into cool weather, even into November. During the summer this lizard is most active mid-morning and late afternoon. In spring and fall it can be active all day.



Plateau Fence Lizard

The Plateau Fence Lizard sits and waits for prey to wander close. It feeds on a variety of insects including termites, ants, beetles, grasshoppers, flies, larvae, wasps and sometimes even small lizards. It hunts on the ground but climbs rocks, trees, fence posts, and woodpiles to bask. It hibernates during the cold months of late fall & winter.



Annual Goldeneye

... the **various yellow daisy-like flowers** in the Center? These are all members of the Sunflower family. *Bahia* remains from summer – it has lobed leaves. *Annual Golden Eye* is in its full glory in fall – it has smooth, linear leaves. Masses of these flowers color some area hillsides in the fall.

What appear as one flower on these plants are actually many, many tiny flowers. Look closely. You can see the tiny flowers packed together forming the bigger “flower.”

The sunflower family is the largest plant family on earth; this strategy grouping a cluster of tiny flowers to look like one bigger flower is used in many formats, including the white, ray-less (rays are parts that look like petals) Wright’s Bee Flower featured in **Signs of September**.

HAVE YOU SEEN ...



Wright Buckwheat

... the **Wright Buckwheat** forming mounds of lovely white flowers? These plants become most showy in the fall. There are many of them along the fence in the parking area and inside the entry gate.

Buckwheat flowers lack petals; but sepals are petal-like and showy. After fertilization the sepals often become thickened and enlarged around the developing fruit. The fruits stay on the plant for some time changing the white mounds to attractive rusty-colored ones. The Buckwheat retains its beauty long after the flowers have gone.

... the round **clearings and mounds made by red harvester ants**? Red harvesters are sometimes mistakenly called *fire ants*, but they are not related to any native or introduced fire ant species. Harvesters have a complex social structure and they will quickly mobilize to defend their colonies against real or perceived attacks. They can bite ferociously and their stings are painful, **so use caution when observing them.**

Harvester ants are seed collectors; they carry seeds into the uppermost chambers of their nest and sort them, removing any rocks or debris they have inadvertently collected. Specialized workers husk the seed and chew it to make nutritious ant bread; some is eaten immediately and the rest is stored for use in the winter. Watch them, they will momentarily make contact with their antennae.



Harvester Ant – closeup

Aerial photos of the Nature Center site were taken in the 1940's -- many of the Harvester Ant mounds were located in the same place that we find them in the Center today. Generations later, progeny are still using the same home sites!

Harvester numbers are declining in some areas of the southwest, likely due to competition for food with invasive ants species. Their decline has also affected other native species, especially those for which this ant is a chief source of food, such as the horned lizard.

HAVE YOU SEEN ...

... the **red and yellow leaves of fall?** Fall colors are limited in wild Arizona, but there are several deciduous shrubs, trees and vines that bring us vibrant autumn colors.

Watch for the Three-Leaf Sumac and the Desert Olive - they are planted in the Habitat Garden, and are also in our natural areas. Three-Leaf Sumac turns yellow, orange and red. The Desert Olive turns bright yellow,

and against its grey, smooth bark, the plant is lovely in fall, especially when backlit.



Three-leaf Sumac



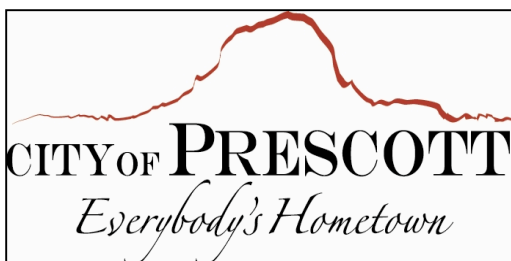
"Fragrant" Goosefoot

...what we call "**Autumn**" or "**Fragrant**" Goosefoot **turning red?** Crush a small piece of its foliage; the aroma is memorable. Its common name is listed as "Fetid Goosefoot" but we don't agree!

This colorful native plant can be found throughout the Nature Center. It's bright green foliage turns to red and maroon as its vibrancy fades. The plant has inconspicuous flowers that produce tiny seeds; these ripen from August to October. Flowers are pollinated by the wind.

This goosefoot can also be found on heavily disturbed sites; in western forests and woodlands it is often one of the first plants to come in after fire.

Spinach, chard & Quinoa are also members of the Goosefoot family.



For more information on the City of Prescott's Open Space and trails go to www.prescotttrails.com

This guide was created in September 1992 & 2013 by Nichole Trushell for the *Community Nature Center of Prescott*. Photos with permission, or by Nichole..

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