

## THINGS THAT GROW ON OAK TREES

**BALL-MOSS** is not a moss, but an air-plant (called an epiphyte) that derives its nutrients and moisture from the air not from the plant it is growing on. Hence, you can find Ball-moss growing quite well on telephone wires. It is a member of the Bromeliad Family that also includes Spanish-moss and pineapples.

**GALLS** are not plants themselves, but are abnormal growth of plant cells, like scar-tissue, that the plant produces in response to bacteria, nematodes, mites or insects. Oak Galls are quarter-sized, papery brown, round growths found on the twigs of oak trees. They are not nuts. Inside is the egg or larval of an insect. Galls don't usually damage plants, although they can weaken stems and twigs, causing them to drop during storms. The biggest problem is appearance.

**LICHENS** are really 2 kinds of non-flowering plants in one: algae and fungi that live together in a symbiotic relationship (for mutual benefit). They are harmless, although they are sensitive to air pollution. The 3 main types of lichens are:

1. "crustose" that are crusty and flat in appearance
2. "fruiticose" that look shrubby
3. "foliose" that are leaf-like.

**MISTLETOE** is a parasitic plant that sends its roots into the wood of the host plant, which allows it to "steal" nutrients from its host. Mistletoe is poisonous; however, birds eat the white berries, and "deposit" the seeds in new locations. Mistletoe grows on several tree species.

**MOSES** are also non-flowering plants. They are generally a bright green and do not have deep roots, or stems. They are found in moist, shady areas, and are harmless.

**MUSHROOMS** or Shelf Fungus can be found on tree trunks. Many are specific to the species of trees that they are on, and they derive their nutrients from the tree, mostly from decaying matter. "Conks" (look like woody mushroom) are fruiting bodies of internal rot diseases.

**VINES** use other plants to help reach sunlight in the woods.

- *Catbrier* is a stiff vine with short, sharp "claws" that is often found growing up into trees. Snail-seed vine (produces red berries) does not have thorns.
- *Grapes* often climb up among trees, wrapping tendrils around branches. Grape vines have a woody bark that can grow to look like small tree trunks (one vine measured 27 inches in circumference). There are several species of grapes in the Hill Country; all provide important food for wildlife.
- *Virginia Creeper* (also in Grape Family) has 5-leaflets that radiate out like fingers on your palm. It holds on with tiny suction cups. It is not poisonous.

- *Seven-leaf Creeper* (Grape Family) has 7-leaflets and is found only in the Hill Country.
- *Poison Ivy & Poison Oak* are members of the Sumac Family. Poison Ivy fastens to tree bark with hairy roots. Poison Oak grows like a shrub. The entire plant contains an oil that can cause a serious rash for people who are allergic to it. The oil can stay active for years. Crushing the leaves releases the oil; washing with dish soap helps cut the oil. The oil can also “travel” in the smoke of a burning plant. Both plants produce white berries and 3-leaves (that is really one leaf with 3-leaflets). Deer can eat the leaves, and birds eat the berries. (Don’t try this at home.)