

ASPARAGUS AETHIOPICUS (LILACEAE) NATURALIZED IN TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

Asparagus aethiopicus is reported here as naturalized in Aransas and Nueces Counties of the Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes Ecoregion in the Coastal Bend (mid-coast) of Texas, where it has formed colonies in the understory of Coastal Live Oak-Redbay Woodlands.

Asparagus aethiopicus L. (asparagus fern, foxtail fern) is a native of to the Cape Provinces and the northern provinces of South Africa. It is considered invasive in Australia and in the USA, where naturalized in Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Missouri, and Virginia (Kartesz 2016). It has been declared a Category I invasive plant in Florida (University of Florida UF/IFAS 2016). Plants can be found spreading along roadsides and invading secondary forest systems. When colonies are formed, native vegetation can be displaced and native species prevented from reestablishing (University of Florida UF/IFAS 2016).

We report *Asparagus aethiopicus* as new to the spontaneous flora of Texas, vouchered by the following collections in Aransas and Nueces counties of the Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes Ecoregion.

Texas. Aransas Co.: 0.1 mi N. of jct. of Bay Rd and N. Fulton Beach Rd on N. Fulton Beach Rd, W side of N. Fulton Beach Rd., in understory of Coastal Live Oak-Redbay Woodland, 7 Mar 2016, *Singhurst 21038* (BAYLU); 0.1 mi. E of jct. of Hwy 35 and N Fulton Beach Rd on N Fulton Beach Rd, N side of N Fulton Beach Rd., in understory of Coastal Live Oak-Redbay Woodland, 7 Mar 2016, *Singhurst 21039* (BAYLU). **Nueces Co.:** 0.05 mi NW of the jct. of Park Rd 22 and Aquarium, near edge of Packery Channel as it merges with the Upper Laguna Madre, in Seashore Bluestem Coastal Prairie, 8 Mar 2016, *Holmes*, *Mink*, and *Singhurst 16643* (BAYLU). Figures 1, 2.

The *Asparagus aethiopicus* populations in Aransas County consist of several colonies ranging from 1 x 1 m to 5 x 7 m growing in the understory of Coastal Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*) and Red Bay (*Persea borbonia*) Woodlands. The associated woody flora includes *Ilex vomitoria*, *Erythrina herbacea*, *Callicarpa americana*, *Malvaviscus arboreus* var. *drummondii*, and *Smilax bona-nox*. The associated herbaceous species include *Andropogon glomeratus*, *Baccharis halimifolia*, *Conoclinium betonicifolium*, *Helianthus argophyllus*, *Hydrocotyle bonariensis*, *Lycium carolinianum*, *Maurandella antirrhiniflora*, and *Schoenoplectus pungens*. The Nueces County population consisted of a small 1 x

1 m patch growing in a Seashore Bluestem (*Schizachyrium littorale*) coastal prairie. Other associated herbaceous species include *Eustachys petraea*, *Fimbristylis caroliniana*, *Flaveria brownii*, *Hydrocotyle bonariensis*, *Iva texensis*, *Lycium carolinianum*, *Schoenoplectus pungens*, *Sisyrinchium* sp., and *Sporobolus virginicus*.



Figure 1. *Asparagus aethiopicus*, Aransas Co., Texas. Photo by Jason Singhurst, 7 March 2016.

Plants of *Asparagus aethiopicus* are slightly woody, evergreen, with upright or trailing branches. They can grow up to 2 feet in height and 6 feet in length. Branchlets are needle-like and clustered in nodes; tiny spines are borne in the axes of the branches. Leaves are fine and needle-like. The flowers are white or pale pink and very fragrant, small and hardly noticeable. Flowering lasts for roughly two weeks during the summer. The fruits are bright red in color and contain 3 seeds per fruit. Birds are highly attracted to the fruit and aid in the dispersal of asparagus fern (University of Florida 2016).



Figure 2. *Asparagus aethiopicus*, Aransas Co., Texas. Photo by Jason Singhurst, 7 March 2016.

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