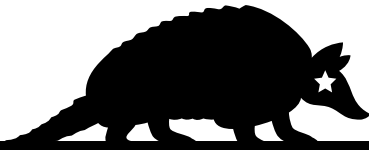


The 65-foot Eiffel Tower replica, adorned by a cowboy hat, at Paris' Love Civic Center.



★ THE LONE STAR STATE. ★

As far as nicknames go, it could be one of the most famous in the world—or at least us Texans like to think so. Far beyond the meandering borders of the Red and Rio Grande rivers, those four little words conjure a larger-than-life mental image of tougher-than-nails cowboys, dusty Longhorn cattle drives, and heroic Alamo defenders. It's an enduring moniker, symbolic of Texans' unwavering independent spirit.

Texian rebels adopted the Lone Star symbol during the Texas Revolution, and in the 180 years since, their descendants have embraced a slew of other symbols to represent the state. Some of these symbols, such as the cowboy hat, Longhorn, and jalapeño pepper, represent our vibrant cultural heritage. Other symbols point to Texas' natural diversity—the pecan tree, mockingbird, and Guadalupe bass, to name a few. Texans are so fond of such comparisons that the Texas Legislature has designated 72 “official” state symbols over the years.

You can't blame the Legislature for stamping this broad collection of favorite objects, animals, and attributes in the state's name. In their diversity, the state's official symbols evoke a range of qualities—from the beauty of the blue topaz (the state gem) to the resilience of the prickly pear cactus (the state plant)—proving that Texas is as much a state of mind as it is a place on the map.

Considering this, we've compiled a few of our favorites from the list of 72 official Texas symbols, along with ideas for places to experience them. Check them out, and while you're on the road, keep an eye out for your pick for No. 73.

The Texas State Library and Archives Commission keeps a full list of Legislature-designated state symbols on its website, www.tsl.texas.gov/ref/abouttx/symbols.html.

★
STATE DISH

Chili

ADOPTED: 1977

From fiercely guarded family recipes to chili restaurants and competition cookoffs across the state, Texans take their chili very seriously. Native son and President Lyndon B. Johnson famously once said, “Chili concocted outside of Texas is usually a weak, apologetic imitation of the real thing. One of the first things I do when I get home to Texas is to have a bowl of red. There is simply nothing better.”

➔ **DESTINATION: Original Terlingua International Championship Chili Cookoff**
Each year hundreds of chili-heads descend on the Big Bend ghost town of Terlingua for the largest chili competition in the world. Now in its 50th year, the event takes place November 2-5, 2016. www.abowlfred.com.





★ STATE FLOWER

Bluebonnets

ADOPTED: 1901, UPDATED: 1971

There's hardly a more beloved symbol in Texas than the bluebonnet. Texas historian and author Jack Maguire once wrote, "The bluebonnet is to Texas what the shamrock is to Ireland ... and the tulip to Holland."

➔ DESTINATION: **The Chappell Hill Bluebonnet Festival**

Located in the lush hills and prairies of Washington County near Brenham, the Chappell Hill area offers some of the best bluebonnet viewing in Texas, as well as the official state bluebonnet festival. The Chappell Hill Historical Society puts on the 52nd Annual Bluebonnet Festival April 9-10, featuring arts-and-crafts vendors, live entertainment, historical tours, children's activities, and more. www.chappellhillmuseum.org/bluebonnet.



Washington County



Willie Nelson statue, Austin

★ STATE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

Guitar

ADOPTED: 1997

When the Texas Legislature designated the guitar as the state musical instrument, the resolution read, "Many of the undisputed masters of this versatile instrument, including Buddy Holly, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Willie Nelson, have hailed from Texas, and the guitar's place in the state's musical history is beyond question." That about sums it up.

➔ DESTINATION: The three musicians invoked in the Legislature's 1997 guitar resolution loom large in Texas—and they'll live on in public artworks that immortalize their places in the state's musical lore. In Lubbock, the West Texas Walk of Fame features a bronze of Buddy Holly playing the guitar. In Austin, an eight-foot statue of Willie Nelson, holding his famous guitar Trigger, smiles over the corner of Willie Nelson Boulevard (2nd Street) and Lavaca. And on Austin's Hike and Bike Trail, find an eight-foot sculpture of Stevie Ray Vaughan at Auditorium Shores.

★ STATE INSECT

Monarch Butterfly

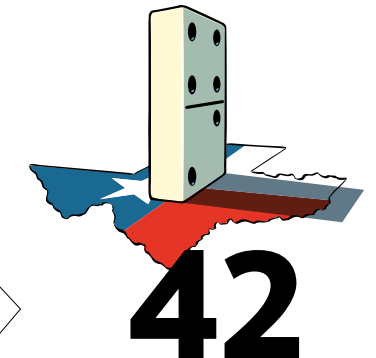
ADOPTED: 1995

A familiar yet treasured sight in Texas, monarch butterflies migrate through the state as they travel south in the fall to their wintering grounds in Mexico. Texas plays a crucial role in the monarchs' life cycle: When they return north in the spring, they lay their eggs on various species of native Texas milkweed; the eggs hatch into milkweed-eating caterpillars that carry on the journey.

➔ DESTINATION: **Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge**

Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the primary purpose of the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge—located on the eastern edge of the Hill Country, northwest of Austin—is to protect habitat for the endangered golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo. In the spring and fall, however, the refuge is also home to thousands of monarchs that flutter across its prairies, cedar brakes, and fields of milkweed. www.fws.gov/refuge/Balcones_Canyonlands.

★ STATE DOMINO GAME



ADOPTED: 2011

The state domino game comes to us from two young boys who invented it in 1887 in their North Texas hometown of Garner, then known as Trapp Spring. According to a 1985 article by Christopher Evans in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, the 12- and 14-year-old got in big trouble for playing cards—forbidden by their devout Baptist parents—and so they made up a similar game using dominos. Played by two teams of two, 42 is a bidding game that revolves around winning tricks. During World War II, enlisted Texans spread the game and 42 became an internationally popular pastime.

➔ DESTINATION: **Hallettsville**

Hallettsville is home to two prestigious domino tournaments—the Texas State Partners Domino Championship, held annually on the third Sunday in January; and during the first weekend in March, the Texas State Championship 42 Domino Tournament, which attracts up to 200 contestants from across the state. www.hallettsville.com/pages/dominos.html.



★ STATE BIRD

MOCKINGBIRD

ADOPTED: 1927

This unassuming gray, white, and black bird sings all across Texas in every habitat, from the desert to the woodlands and the beach. Mockingbirds are remarkable vocalists, singing their own songs and mimicking other birds—the inspiration for their name. They are also fiercely territorial and will fight to protect their homes.

➔ **DESTINATION: South Llano River State Park**

The 2,650-acre park, just southwest of Junction in the western Hill Country, features four birding blinds in a variety of habitats, from rocky uplands to the river bottom. Mockingbirds can be seen—and heard—year-round. www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/south-llano-river.



★ STATE TREE

Pecan

ADOPTED: 1919

Native to the rich river and creek bottoms of Central and East Texas, pecan trees produce highly prized sweet nuts and are popular landscaping trees because of their shady foliage. Even the wood is valuable—for furniture, flooring, and smoking meats. Texas is among the nation's largest producers of pecans, including native and improved varieties.

➔ **DESTINATION:**

Berdoll Pecan Farms

Berdoll Pecan Candy & Gift Company is a family-owned operation in Cedar Creek (between Austin and Bastrop), a couple of miles from the Berdoll pecan orchard. Along with souvenirs and sweets, its retail location features Ms. Pearl—a 14-foot squirrel sculpture—and a pecan vending machine that's open 24 hours per day, seven days a week. www.berdollpecanfarm.com.



cactus pads and pears were prized as an important food source for native peoples and remain a component of Mexican and Southwestern cooking. Ranchers burn the spines off to use the cactus for cattle feed during times of drought. The cactus has also seen a surge in contemporary cuisine in recent decades with prickly pear jellies, sodas, margaritas, salad dressings, sauces, and more.

➔ **DESTINATION:**

Texas Jack Wild West Outfitters

Just off Fredericksburg's main drag, Texas

Jack's is a Western wear, gear, and gun store named for John Burwell "Texas Jack" Omohundro, a legendary Civil War scout and frontier cowboy. Adding to the shop's mystique, its 1889 storefront is adorned by sprawling prickly pear cactus plants on which visitors carve their names. www.texasjacks.com.

★ STATE PLANT

PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS

ADOPTED: 1995

Texas is home to about 20 species of prickly pear—a thick-skinned cactus fortified with large needle-sharp spines as well as smaller, nearly invisible spines called glochids. Despite their tough exterior, the

★ STATE FISH

GUADALUPE BASS

ADOPTED: 1989

Native to the Hill Country streams of Central Texas, Guadalupe bass are treasured by fly fishermen for the beautiful Edwards Plateau habitats they occupy and their spunky fight. Guadalupe bass are relatively small—the state record is about 3.5 pounds—and distinguished by the diamond-shaped pattern on their sides.

➔ **DESTINATION: Guadalupe River State Park**

The Guadalupe River is home to abundant populations and pure strains of the state fish. Fishing is included in the entry fee at Guadalupe River State Park, located 30 miles north of San Antonio, and no fishing license is required. www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/guadalupe-river.



PHOTO: © Tosh Brown

★ STATE MOTTO

Friendship

ADOPTED: 1930

Our state's name originates from a Spanish variation of the Caddo Indian word "tejas," meaning friendship. Native peoples and Spanish explorers greeted each other with "tejas"—and the name stuck.

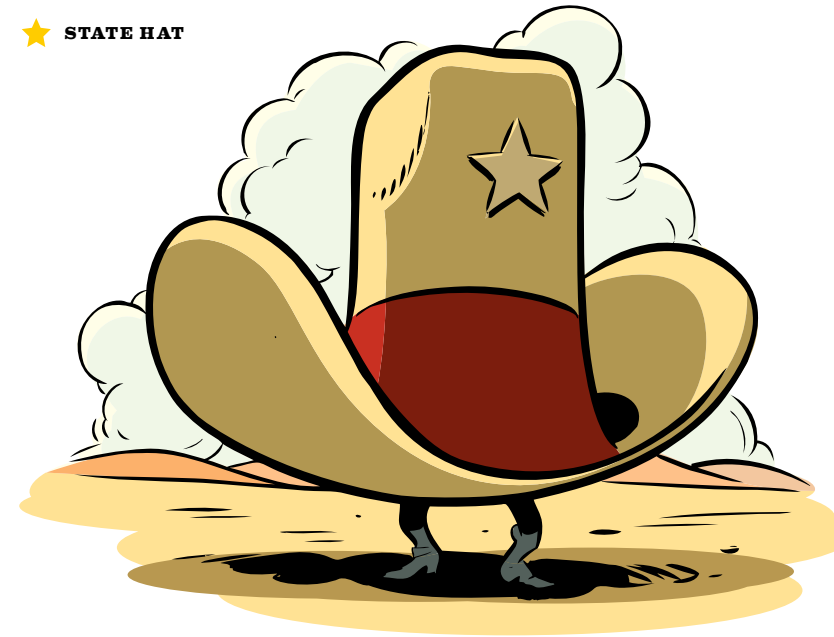
➔ DESTINATION:

La Antorcha de la Amistad

La Antorcha de la Amistad, Spanish for The Torch of Friendship, is a prominent abstract sculpture located on a roundabout median at the intersection of Commerce and Losoya streets in downtown San Antonio. Mexican sculptor Sebastián created the reddish-orange ribbon of steel and presented it as a gift from the Mexican government to the City of San Antonio in 2002.



★ STATE HAT



Cowboy Hat

ADOPTED: 2015

John B. Stetson first popularized wide-brimmed felt hats designed to provide protection from the elements in the 1860s, giving rise to the iconic Western cowboy hat. In Texas, range-riding ranch hands embraced the hats early on, and ever since, the cowboy hat has symbolized the state's Western culture and spirit.

➔ DESTINATION: **Ben's Texas Hat Museum; The Hatco Factory**

In the South Texas town of Cotulla, Ben's Western Wear features a Hat Museum that has grown to include hundreds of hats from local ranchers, cowboys, and even public figures like Nolan Ryan and George Strait. www.benswesternwear.com. In Garland, Hatco carries on the tradition of John B. Stetson with a factory that makes both felt and straw hats under the brand names of Stetson, Resistol, and others. Call 972/494-0511 for tours.

★ STATE LARGE MAMMAL

Longhorn

ADOPTED: 1995

Texas Longhorns are hybrid descendants of Spanish cattle brought to the New World by Christopher Columbus in 1493; Spanish missionaries introduced them to Texas in the 1700s. In an era before barbed-wire fencing, free-range Longhorns roamed wild, multiplied, and developed resistances to regional diseases and parasites, as well as the Texas heat. Texas ranchers embraced the breed during the heyday of the 19th-Century cattle drives, because of their abundance, ruggedness, and ability to gain weight on long drives. The record for the longest-horned Longhorn goes to the late "Amigo Yates" of the Yates Ranch in Alpine—he had a span of 8 feet, 9.5 inches.

➔ DESTINATION: **Fort Worth Herd Longhorn Cattle Drive**

At the historic Fort Worth Stockyards, cowhands re-create an Old West scene with cattle drives of the Fort Worth Herd down Exchange Avenue. These prime photo ops take place at 11:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. daily. www.fortworthstockyards.org.

★ STATE FOOTWEAR

COWBOY BOOT

ADOPTED: 2007

Western-style cowboy boots were cemented in Texas culture during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Boot makers like Salvatore Lucchese in San Antonio, H.J. Justin in Spanish Fort and then Nocona, and Tony Lama in El Paso began producing riding boots designed for function and style with a higher heel and more rounded toe—thus the Western-style cowboy boot was born.

➔ DESTINATION:

Texas Junk Company in Houston

Famous for its used footwear, Texas Junk Company boasts a selection of "over 1,000 used cowboy boots from \$30." The shop, located at 215 Welch St., opens most Fridays and Saturdays. Call first, 713/524-6257.





★ STATE FRUIT



Texas Red Grapefruit

ADOPTED: 1993

A true Texas original, the ruby red grapefruit came about by accident. In 1929, a McAllen grower named A.E. Henninger discovered a mutated grapefruit that was red in color and much sweeter than the typical pink and white varieties. Henninger's mutant grapefruit strain, along with mutated citrus from other regional growers, were cultivated, perfected over the years, and eventually marketed under the name "Ruby Red." Today, ruby reds are widely considered the world's best grapefruit variety.

➔ DESTINATION:

Mission Citrus Fiesta

Mission celebrates its agricultural roots each January with the annual Texas Citrus Fiesta. Highlights include the Product Costume Contest, in which costumes must be decorated with citrus or citrus-based coloring, and the Parade of Oranges, which has a contest category that requires floats to be at least 85 percent covered in locally grown citrus. www.texascitrusfiesta.org.

★ STATE FLYING MAMMAL

MEXICAN FREE-TAILED BAT

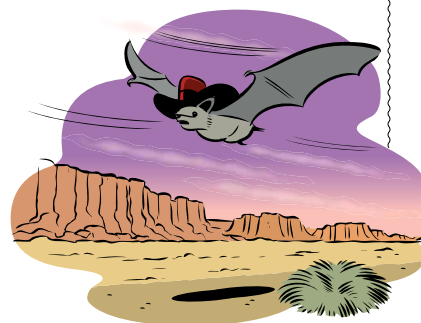
ADOPTED: 1995

From March through October, droves of Texans gather to watch columns of swirling bats emerge from cavernous roosts, like the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin and Bracken Cave near San Antonio. During the summer, Central Texas is home to an estimated 100 million Mexican free-tailed bats, making up one of the world's largest concentrations of mammals, according to Austin-based Bat Conservation International.

➔ DESTINATION:

Old Tunnel State Park

Located between Fredericksburg and Comfort, Old Tunnel State Park's abandoned railroad tunnel is the summer home to some 3 million Mexican free-tailed bats. Visitors can watch the bats' nightly emergence free of charge from the upper viewing area, or from the up-close perspective of the lower viewing area (\$5). www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/old-tunnel.



John T. Floore
Country Store,
Helotes

★ STATE DANCE

Western Swing

ADOPTED: 2011

Bob Wills and Milton Brown—known as the “king” and “father” of Western swing, respectively—pioneered this blend of fiddle music with jazz, blues, and folk in the 1920s and '30s. Their bands developed a distinctive genre that's carried on today by popular acts like Asleep at the Wheel and the Hot Texas Swing Band.

➔ DESTINATION: **Bob Wills Fiddle Festival & Contest; Bob Wills Day**

Festivals across the state celebrate Western swing music, drawing fiddlers, fans, and dancers in tribute to the state's official music. In Greenville, the Bob Wills Fiddle Festival & Contest celebrates all things Wills October 6-9, 2016, while the Panhandle town of Turkey fetes its hometown hero with Bob Wills Day April 27-30, 2016. www.greenvillechamber.com; www.bobwillsday.com.

★ STATE SHELL

Lightning Whelk

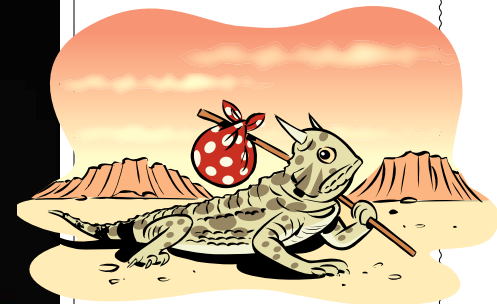
ADOPTED: 1987

Found only on the western Gulf Coast, the lightning whelk's name comes from the radiating, lightning-like stripes that adorn the shell. Its large and cone-like shape—unlike most shells, it spirals counter-clockwise—make it one of the most attractive and easily identifiable shells on Texas beaches.

➔ DESTINATION: **Padre Island National Seashore**

Beachgoers are welcome to comb the sandy beaches of Padre Island National Seashore for the state shell. Big Shell Beach, located about halfway down the island and requiring a four-wheel-drive vehicle to access, is a particularly good spot for shelling, park rangers say. www.nps.gov/pais/planyourvisit/beachcombing.htm.

★ STATE REPTILE



TEXAS HORNED TOAD

ADOPTED: 1993

It may sound scary—a horned creature that can shoot blood from its eyes when threatened—but this small reptile is one of the most beloved animals in Texas. Commonly called horny toads or horned frogs, these scaled lizards are mostly found in the western two-thirds of Texas, where they feed primarily on harvester ants.

➔ DESTINATION:

Chaparral Wildlife Management Area

Located in South Texas near Artesia Wells, the 15,200-acre Chaparral Wildlife Management Area was ranched and drilled before the state acquired the land for wildlife research. The Texas horned toad is known to like it in this patch of Brush Country habitat. www.facebook.com/ChaparralWMA.



★ STATE NATIVE SHRUB

TEXAS PURPLE SAGE

ADOPTED: 2005

Known for its soft, silvery foliage and showy purple blooms that peak in summer and continue through fall, Texas purple sage (also known as cenizo) is a hardy, medium-sized shrub native to the Rio Grande Plains, Trans-Pecos, and Edwards Plateau regions of Texas. Purple sage is as resilient as it is rugged: It is drought tolerant, heat-resistant, and can withstand temperatures as low as five degrees.

➔ **DESTINATION: Pennybacker Bridge—Lake Austin, Loop 360 Overlook**

This popular scenic overlook in northwest Austin provides commanding views of Lake Austin and the undulating hills that surround it. The overlook's steep terraces are lined with wonderful purple sage plants that bloom summer through fall, especially about two weeks after a rainfall. The overlook, located at 5300 North Capital of Texas Highway, is open to the public.

★ STATE SMALL MAMMAL

Armadillo

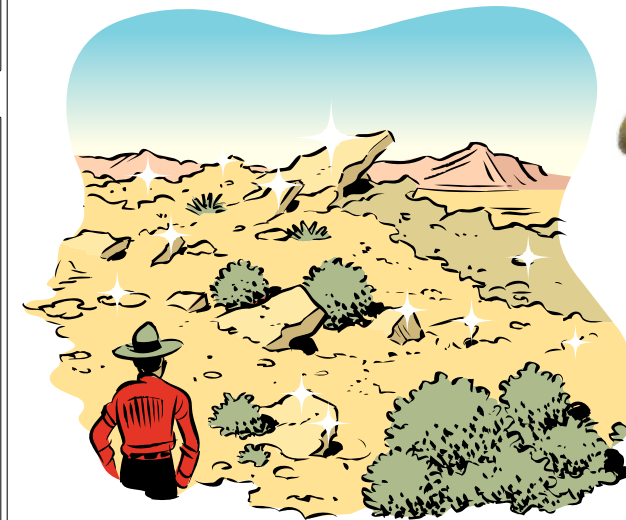
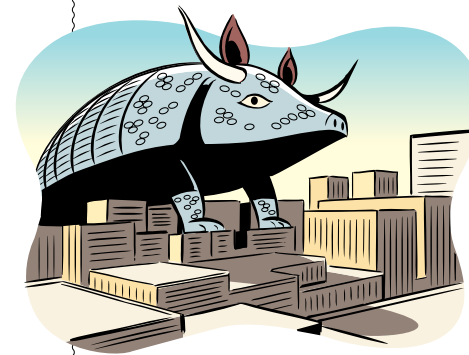
ADOPTED: 1995

Walk into just about any Texas gift shop and you're likely to find rows of armadillo key chains, toys, games, apparel, and more. In recognizing this armor-plated critter as a state symbol, the Legislature noted its "many remarkable and unique traits, some of which parallel the attributes that distinguish a true Texan, such as a deep respect and need for the land, the ability to change and adapt, and a fierce undying love for freedom." Found everywhere in Texas except the western Trans-Pecos, the armadillo is a common sight along river bottoms and in wooded areas.

➔ **DESTINATION:**

Goode's Armadillo Palace

Goode's Armadillo Palace, a restaurant and live music venue in southwest Houston, elevates the armadillo to new heights with its 12-foot-tall glittering armadillo that stands guard out front—complete with horns and red glowing eyes. www.goodecompany.com/restaurant-arm.asp.



★ STATE GEM

TEXAS BLUE TOPAZ

ADOPTED: 1969

Rock hounds flock to Mason County to hunt for Texas blue topaz, a gem found only in this area of the state. Colorless topaz and less common light-blue varieties can also be found within billion-year-old Precambrian granite outcroppings and streambeds throughout the Mason area.

➔ **DESTINATION: Mason County ranches**

Commercial topaz mining is not allowed, but three Mason County ranches welcome prospectors to hunt for topaz for a fee—the Bar M Ranch, Seaquist Ranch, and Lindsay Ranch. www.barmranchservices.com/topaz; www.masontexastopaz.com; www.lindsayranch.net.

★ STATE PEPPER

Jalapeño

ADOPTED: 1995

Beloved for their creeping yet undeniable burn, jalapeño peppers are used to fire up dishes, strengthen salsa, and challenge competitive eaters. Some like them best stuffed with cheese, wrapped in bacon, and then fried or grilled. Texans' affinity for the jalapeño helps make the state one of the largest producers and consumers of the peppers in the world.

➔ **DESTINATION: Texas Hill Country Distillers; Cuero Turkeyfest**

Texas Hill Country Distillers in Comfort produces a handcrafted Texas Jalapeño Moonshine, which is fermented with Fredericksburg-grown peppers and makes a zingy Bloody Mary. www.hillcountrytxdistillers.com. In Cuero, the annual Turkeyfest (October 7-9, 2016) features one of the state's many jalapeño-eating contests. The winner is the eater who finishes 12 jalapeños first or the most in 60 seconds. *Aye Yai Yai!* www.turkeyfest.org. ★

