



The Sabal

May 2016

Volume 33, number 5

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Plant species page #s in the Sabal refer to:
“**Plants of Deep South Texas**” (PDST).

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NPP March meeting/speaker:

Tues., May 24th, at 7:30pm

The Native Plant Project will have a “**Round Table Plant Discussion**” in lieu of the usual PowerPoint presentation. We are encouraging everyone to bring a native plant cutting from your yard to be identified and discussed at the meeting. It can be a plant you are unfamiliar with or something that you find remarkable, i.e. blooms for long periods of time or has fruit all winter or is simply gorgeous. We will take one plant at a time and discuss it with entire group inviting all comments about your experience with that native. It should be fun. Don't forget your cuttings when you join us.

Valley Nature Center,
 301 S Border,
 (in Gibson Park),
 Weslaco. 956-969-2475.



Lantana Scrub Hairstreak butterfly perched on a host plant: *Lantana velutina*, (PDST p417). Photographed by John Brush at Quinta Mazatlan. Butterfly diversity increased during May 2016.

The Sabal is the newsletter of the Native Plant Project.

It conveys information on native plants, habitats and environment of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas.

Previous **Sabal** issues are posted on our website [www.NativePlantProject.org].

Electronic versions of our **Handbooks** on recommended natives for landscaping are also posted there.

Change of address, missing issue, or membership: <bwessling@rgv.rr.com>

President - Ken King - <wk_king01@yahoo.com>

Mining information on “scentsational” shrubs — by Christina Mild
A glimpse into several excellent reference books on our native plants.

Aloysia macrostachya, (PDST p411) is an airy shrub with spikes of tiny purple flowers. Locally it is called **Sweet Stem** (Vara Dulce) for the fragrance of its foliage. (Verbenaceae)

A. gratissima



A. macrostachya



A. wrightii



Aloysia macrostachya

Aloysia macrostachya (Torr.) Moldenke (woolly bee-brush) is native from northeastern Mexico north to the southern half of the Rio Grande Plains, where it is locally common in dry, well-drained caliche hills and arroyos. These shrubs rise 1–2 m (40–80"). The leaf blades are ovate and 7–30 mm (0.3–1.2") long, and their underfaces are densely beset with a grayish felt. When crushed, they release a pungent odor reminiscent of thyme. The inflorescence far surpasses the leaves. The corolla is 5 mm (0.2") long and pink to red or lavender.

COMMON NAMES: purple bee brush, salvia (South Texas), woolly bee-brush.

Excerpts above are taken from: **The Useful Wild Plants of Texas...** Vol. 1. By S. Cheatham and M. C. Johnston with L. Marshall. 1995. (pp 247-251)

This is an exhaustive series, intended to cover every native plant found anywhere in Texas. Each photo is excellent. The range maps are a marvelous resource (notice that Sweet Stem doesn't grow in Cameron county).

For each genus, shared characteristics are presented as a group.

The economic uses of each genus is covered in detail, including every finding ranging from archeological information around the globe, information from tribal history, interviews with local native plant experts, and including scientific studies of chemistry and pharmacology.

In the case of *Aloysia*, two pages of “Economic Uses” are included. These include such varied details as flavorant, honey, perfume, home deodorizer, basketry, landscape, propagation, and horse toxicity.

See [<http://usefulwildplants.org/>] for more information about this project.

(4 volumes are available from Native American Seed for \$140.00 each [www.seedsources.com].)

Amyris texana, **Texas Torchwood**, (PDST p375) survives full sun or even the shade of an ebony tree. Torchwoods sport clusters of white flowers, followed by edible fruit, probably loaded with vitamin C. Rutaceae (Citrus). Brushing against these leaves brings forth a waft of very pleasant citrus essence.

Excerpts on this species are taken from: **How to Grow Native Plants of Texas and the Southwest**, by Jill Nokes. Revised and Updated Edition, copyright 2001. (pp 112-113)

Nokes includes descriptive information on each Genus considered in this useful volume. For *Amyris*, she lists these common names: Torchwood, Chapotillo, Lantrisco, and Limonaria.

The invaluable information which is unique to this reference is very complete data on how to propagate, giving details unique to each species. Propagation of Texas Torchwood, for example, is not the same as that recommended for Mountain Torchwood (*Amyris madrensis*).

This title is currently available on Amazon.com from \$8.31 to \$17.52. Black and white. No photos.

PROPAGATION

Seeds

A. texana will germinate only from fresh seed. Even seed stored only a few months will fail to germinate. The seeds of *A. texana* are soft, so they must be depulped gently. Immediately aerate them for 1-2 days, before they have a chance to dry after cleaning. Seeds planted in September to November right after collection usually germinate in 2-3 weeks (Best 1999).

A. madrensis may be grown from untreated seed collected the previous season and then planted outdoors in the spring after all danger of frost is past, or earlier in the greenhouse. The soil must be warm before germination will proceed. To achieve reasonable germination rates from *A. madrensis*, it is first necessary to remove the outer seed coat or testa (Best 1999). The ...



Left: Texas Torchwood, *Amyris texana*, in fruit and in bloom. Photos by C. Mild.



Right: Jill Nokes photo from the web.

Desert (Mexican) Oregano, *Lippia graveolens*, (PDST p418) is adorned with tiny white blooms, and smells as you'd expect from the name. It grows very well in cultivation.

Excerpts on this species are taken from **Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of the Southwest**, by Robert A. Vines, 1960. It is a black and white volume of ~1100 pages, illustrated with superb line drawings. Species and common names may be quite different from currently-accepted nomenclature. However, the goldmine of information included makes a bit of nomenclatural confusion worth the bother.

Although the Medicinal Uses of Mexican Oregano, as presented below, are rather limited, other species have an incredible listing of uses and common names. In general, Dr. Vines provides a wealth of common names in use by various tribes and cultures, as well as medicinal and other common uses of each plant. The very complete description of range is quite helpful also.

This book is out of print and difficult to procure. Amazon.com is offering a few copies ranging from \$120 to \$231 from various sellers. It is unfortunate that many libraries, including local universities, discard valuable resources such as this one if patrons appear to be utilizing the title infrequently.



RED BRUSH
Lippia graveolens H. B. K.

RANGE. On rocky slopes, in dry soil of arroyos and chaparral thickets. In southern, central, and western Texas southward through Mexico to Nicaragua.

MEDICINAL USES. Also known under the vernacular name of Orégano in Central America, where it is used as a tonic, stimulant, and expectorant, and also as a condiment.

REMARKS. The genus name, *Lippia*, honors Auguste Lippi (1678–1703), French naturalist. The species name, *graveolens*, means “strong smelling,” with reference to the plant’s aromatic scent. The plant is listed in some botanical publications under the names of *Lantana origonoides* Mort. & Gal., *Lippia berlandieri* Schau., and *Goniostachyum graveolens* (H. B. K.) Small, and it is also known under the vernacular name of Hierba Dulce. The lippias have been reviewed by Moldenke (1942, pp. 53–55).























Mexican (Desert) Oregano.
Photo by C. Mild.

Shrubby Blue Sage, *Salvia ballotiflora*, (PDST p287) sports brilliant blue blossoms with a bit of fertilizer and watering. One imagines roasting poultry with a whiff of these leaves. It's called Meajorana: even the aroma leaves a person feeling "better." Leaves are used in cooking and for tea. (Lamiaceae)

Excerpts on this species are taken from: **Common Woody Plants & Cacti of South Texas**, by Richard B. Taylor, 2014. (Unfortunately, only 2 cacti are included!) This is a small, but handy guide for learning and keying out our most common shrubs. They are grouped according to whether thorns are present, and whether thorns are curved or straight. Included are some species not native to deep south Texas. Not all of our native shrubs are included (we have hundreds of them). On Amazon this title costs from \$15-23.

Appendix I, Benefits of Plants to Wildlife in South Texas (inset) is helpful in species selection for wildlife:

Shrubby blue sage				
Southwest bernardia				
Spanish dagger				
Sugar hackberry				
Tasajillo				

LAMIACEAE Mint Family

Shrubby blue sage

Salvia ballotiflora

(blue salvia, blue sage, shrubby blue salvia, meajorana)

DESCRIPTION Shrubby blue sage is an intricately branched, *aromatic, small- to medium-sized shrub with pale, dark gray, square stems* growing 2–6 ft. tall. The simple, opposite leaves are light green and hairy, with serrated margins. The bell-shaped, 3-lobed flowers are bluish-purple and grow in elongated clusters that bloom intermittently all spring and summer, especially after rains, before producing a tiny and inconspicuous fruit.

Shrubby blue sage is a fairly common, minor component of mixed-brush communities throughout south Texas. It prefers well-drained, shallow, rocky or sandy soils, brushy slopes, and gravelly and limestone hills and slopes, and it is frequently *associated with blackbrush acacia, guajillo, and cenizo*. Shrubby blue



sage does not pose a habitat management problem, thus control is not recommended.

VALUES Third choice

White-tailed deer occasionally browse the leaves, and small rodents eat the fruit. Additionally, small mammals and reptiles utilize shrubby blue sage for cover. Butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds are attracted to the flower, and Painted Lady caterpillars are known to be found on it. When dried and crushed, the aromatic leaves have reportedly been used for flavoring meats and other foods. Shrubby blue sage is sometimes used as a landscape, wildscape, or xeriscape plant because of its drought tolerance, aroma, and showy blue flowers.

Crude Protein Value*

- Spring leaves: 12–18%
- Summer leaves: 14%
- Fall leaves: 14%
- Winter leaves: 11%
- Mast: 10%

*Range in value results from variation among studies and is influenced by climate, soil types, plant growth stage, etc.

Dalea scandens var. **pauciflora** (PDST p261) is another of my favorite aromatic shrubs. It is barely noticeable on sunny edges of Arroyo Colorado Brush, with clusters of nondescript pinkish blossoms. Scent makes it worth cultivation, though rubbing the leaves, blooms or fruit leaves a yellow stain. It transplants readily, growing easily and rapidly with little care. At Ramsey Park, we've been able to establish this species with direct-sown seed. It is a hostplant to the Southern Dogface butterfly. As a legume, it probably increases soil fertility and can grow in poor soils. **Shrubby Dalea** is probably the best common name. (Fabaceae)

Many of the Daleas smell good when rubbed, but *Dalea scandens* is possibly the easiest to cultivate.

Dalea scandens var. **pauciflora** is an example of a native species not found in many reference books. The best information we have about it comes from local experience and **Plants of Deep South Texas**, which is, of course, our best go-to guide for locally-native plants.



Dalea scandens
photo by C. Mild.



A gardening tip from Dr. Richardson:
“I have noticed that if I lightly prune shrubs such as the Salvia, Viguiera, and others, immediately after bloom is finished, the plants will produce fresh blooms (if given water). That gives more blooms and also keeps the shrub closer to the desired size.”

For anyone with time and access to the internet, all kinds of surprising information about our native plants can be found.

A quick Google search on *Dalea scandens* brought up the abstract below.

The closely-related *Dalea scandens* variety analyzed in this study shows potential for use in treating *Staphylococcus* infections.

Planta Med. 2002 Jun;68(6):519-22.

Flavonoids with activity against methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* from *Dalea scandens* var. **paucifolia**.

Nanayakkara NP1, Burandt CL Jr, Jacob MR. (School of Pharmacy, Univ. of Mississippi)

Abstract:

Bioassay-guided fractionation of the ethyl acetate extract of the roots of *Dalea scandens* (Miller) R. Clausen var. **paucifolia** led to the isolation of new flavonoids, 2(S)-5'-(-1'',1''-dimethylallyl)-8-(3'',3''-dimethylallyl)-2',4',5,7-tetrahydroxyflavanone, 2(S)-5'-(1'',1''-dimethylallyl)-8-(3'',3''-dimethylallyl)-2'-methoxy-4',5,7-trihydroxyflavanone and 5'-(1'',1''-dimethylallyl)-8-(3'',3''-dimethylallyl)-2',4',5,7-tetrahydroxyflavone. Structure elucidation was carried out by spectroscopic methods. All three compounds showed significant activity against both methicillin-susceptible and methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.

Found on PubMed.gov, of the US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health.

LRGV Native Plant Sources

See also our
Sponsors on right

Perez Ranch Nursery

(Betty Perez)

12 miles north of La Joya, TX

(956) 580-8915

<PerezRanchNatives@gmail.com>

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Old Military Hwy/3333 Butterfly Pk Dr

Mission, TX 78572

office (956) 583-5400

Marianna Trevino Wright, Exec.Dir.

cell 956-648-7117

<mariana@nationalbutterflycenter.org>

[http://www.nationalbutterflycenter.org]

Rancho Lomitas Nursery

(Benito Trevino)

P.O. Box 442

Rio Grande City, TX 78582

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Valley Garden Center

701 E. Bus. Hwy. 83

McAllen, TX 78501

(956) 682-9411

M&G Double D Native Plants & Seeds of South Texas, (Gail Dantzker)

956-342-5979; <gdld@att.net>

7500 N 21st St; McAllen, TX 78504

[mandgdoubled.com]

Grown at The Woods, Willacy Cty., TX.

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Photo above by Dan & Honeylet Jones at SPI Convention Center illustrates the importance of insects to this migrating yellow warbler.

NPP Board & General Meetings are held at Valley Nature Center (see ABOVE)

(4th Tues. each month)

Brd Mtgs 6:30pm — Speaker 7:30pm.

remaining 2016 meetings: Sept. 27, Oct. 25, Nov. 22

FROM: NPP; POB 2742; San Juan, TX 78589

The **Native Plant Project (NPP)** has no paid staff or facilities. NPP is supported entirely by memberships and contributions. Anyone interested in native plants is invited to join. Members receive 8 issues of **The Sabal** newsletter per year in which they are informed of all project activities and meetings.

Meetings are held at:

Valley Nature Center, 301 S. Border, Weslaco, TX.

Native Plant Project Membership Application

Regular \$20/yr. Contributing \$45/yr

Life \$250 one time fee/person

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NPP March meeting/speaker:

Tues., May 24th, 7:30pm

The Native Plant Project will present:

“Round Table Plant Discussion”

(See page 1)

The meeting is held at
Valley Nature Center,
301 S Border, (in Gibson Park), Weslaco.
956-969-2475.



In this issue:

Mining information on
“scentsational” shrubs

Photo: Shrubby Blue Sage

2016 has been very dry in deep south Texas. In areas where irrigation isn't available, many species are no longer blooming. Despite this, butterfly diversity is beginning to rise, according to reports on local Facebook pages.

As I walked around the driest parts of Ramsey park in May, I found lots of seed available for birds and other critters. Plants which bloomed prodigiously over winter, including pink mint and coastal germander, were loaded with small seeds.

In dry brush, I often enjoy the aromatic leaves of some favorite species. Each species featured in this issue makes a good choice for planting in a sensory garden.

This is the last issue of **The Sabal** until September. Summer might be a good time to explore the many excellent reference books available on native plants. In this issue, the editor presents excerpts from several favorites, illustrating the unique perspective gained from each.