



The Sabal

January 2014

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Page number references for each species shown in the Sabal refer to: **"Plants of Deep South Texas," (PDST).**

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January 2014 Mtg., Native Plant Project:

Tues., Jan. 28, 2014: at 7:30pm

"Why Some Non-Natives Become Invasive"

Dr. John Goolsby will discuss why some non-native species become invasive and how they can negatively interact with native and agricultural ecosystems.

John is a third generation native of the Rio Grande Valley. His grandparents were early settlers in Brownsville and San Benito. He received his B.S. and Ph.D. from Texas A&M in entomology (study of insects). John is employed with the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture as a research entomologist. He currently researches the biological control of invasive species that impact the Rio Grande Basin and South Texas Agriculture, including carrizo cane, an invasive European weed, and cattle fever ticks.

The Native Plant Project will also have refreshments at this meeting to celebrate our 40th year of educating the public, encouraging preservation of natural areas and promoting landscaping with native plants. The meeting is held at:

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



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>

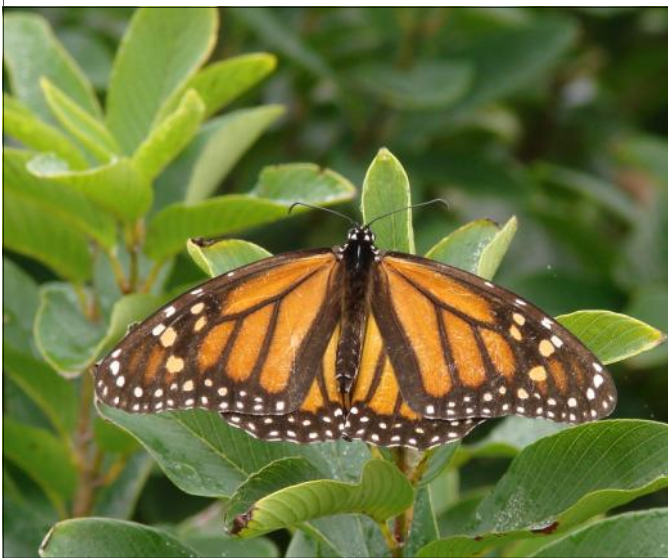
President - Ken King - (956)-968-8890 - <wk_king01@yahoo.com>

Winter Wonders. Natives With Winter Promise:

—Article and photos by Christina Mild

Many plants, native or otherwise, become dormant when temperatures or moisture drop below parameters needed for active growth. However, many common natives used in landscaping and revegetation stand out beautifully in wintry conditions.

Such attributes as blooms, fruit, and changes in leaf coloration are the obvious attributes which gardeners love. A bit less obvious, but quite important, are the many plants which retain their leaves in profusion. Leaves *en masse* provide protection in a multitude of ways, as well as providing food for a host of insects and larger animals. Ebony, Cedar Elm and Tepeguaje are full of leaves in winter.



The fresh Monarch butterfly above is sunning on a leafy Coyotillo (*Karwinskia humboldtiana*, PDST p. 366.) Abundant leaves provide more moderate temperatures and many hiding places.



Hummingbirds are partial to Anacahuita, *Cordia bois-sieri*, PDST p. 141, which retains the leaves during winter.



Above: Ripening fruits on Negrito (*Citharexylum berlandieri*, PDST p. 412) attract mockingbirds, other birds, and sap-eating butterflies such as the Mexican Bluewing.



Few of us would choose to cultivate Desert Christmas Cactus, Tasajillo (*Opuntia leptocaulis*, PDST p 171). However, it provides fruit in the driest areas for woodpeckers and other birds.



It's tempting to include *Passiflora suberosa* (PDST p. 347) in every Sabal issue. Fruit is omnipresent and Gulf Fritillary larvae can usually be spotted. (See adult butterfly on p.6)



continued on p.3....

continued from p. 2.....

Lantanas in Winter:



Lantana velutina, above, PDST p. 417, blooms during mild winters. Severe cold will freeze this plant to the ground. Planting it is worth the gamble, as it has perhaps the most attractive foliage of native lantanas and seems the most resistant to the usual garden pests. Red-bordered Metalmark male is nectaring in the photo.



Lantana urticoides (previously *horrida*) PDST p. 416. This gorgeous plant blooms well during winter, and during colder weather it is less-dramatically affected by white-fly, molds, viruses, and other pests. When this plant's foliage turns ugly in summer, you might just trim it back and wait for cooler weather to return.



Closely-related is West Indian Lantana, with yellow-pink bloom clusters. It is *Lantana camara*, PDST p. 415. Native to the West Indies, it has occurred in Deep South Texas for over 100 years.

Each of the Lantana species on this page provides berries for birds and can be established from wild-collected seed. *Lantanas urticoides* and *camara* are often spread by bird droppings. Both species are attacked by numerous pathogens, especially when cotton is defoliated and whitefly seeks new places to spread.



Above: Sulphur butterfly nectaring in mid-January.

continued on p.4....

continued from p. 3.....

Foliage Colors—

A moist winter has benefitted *Croton cortesianus*, PDST p.215. North American Snout butterflies are nectaring on this croton in the two photos below.



This beautiful croton (above and left) is easily grown, easily transplanted, and self-propagating. Orange-tinted foliage appears in response to any environmental stress or extreme, and is an especially attractive feature.

Crotons are host plants for Leafwing butterflies. They are also very good nectar providers.



Above: *Plumbago scandens*, PDST p. 352, will colonize in shade or sun. It provides excellent nectar, especially in fall. The reddish foliage is awesome.

Other Winter Blooms and Fruit —



Bastardia viscosa, PDST p. 307, has stinky foliage. It colonizes sunny areas and edges. Winter blooms are especially important to the few butterflies which remain in the coldest season.

Right: *Mammillaria prolifera*, PDST p. 169.

This colony-forming cactus grows well in pots and produces tiny but tasty fruit. It is becoming rare in the wild as habitat is disrupted.



Above: *Vara Dulce*, *Aloysia macrostachya* PDST p. 411. This airy shrub with sweet-smelling foliage is lovely in the garden and an excellent butterfly nectar plant. It is native to Hidalgo and Starr counties, but can be grown elsewhere.

Early Wildflowers—Wildflowers are not abundant in January, but some species perform well, especially where they receive adequate sun and moisture. These species were photographed on South Padre Island, in Ramsey Nature Park in Harlingen, and at my home.



Left:
Prostrate Fleabane,
Erigeron procumbens.
PDST p. 97

Below:
Camphor Weed,
Heterotheca subaxillaris, *PDST p. 108*.



Below: Queen Butterfly on Padre Island Mistflower, *Conoclinium betonicifolium*. *PDST p. 93*. This species has bloomed abundantly throughout the winter of 2013-4. No photo: *Tamauilpa azurea* *PDST p. 127*, a mistflower which blooms in spring.



Right: Indian Blanket, *Gaillardia pulchella*. *PDST p. 100*. (Blooming where planted and irrigated.)



Below: *Palafoxia texana* var. *ambigua* blooming amidst SPI Mistflower, where planted and irrigated. *PDST p. 115*.



Above: Cow Pen Daisy, *Verbesina encelioides*, is easily established from wild-collected seed, but it may out-compete other natives. Tolerant of poor soils. *PSDT p. 134*. No photo: *Helianthus annuus* *PDST p. 105*, Common Sunflower is prolific in many farm fields. Easily established, it requires a bit more space.

Right: Scarlet Sage, *Salvia coccinea*, *PDST p. 288*. Produces brilliant blooms throughout the year in a wide variety of soils. Good nectar plant for hummingbirds and butterflies.



Perils of Previous Plantings—*C. Mild*

Several of the most commonly-used landscape plants are real demons in terms of control.

For example, the native plantings around the South Padre Island Convention Center receive water from an automatic irrigation system. This is a good thing, except.....!!!! Carpet grass was previously planted in the areas now occupied by native gardens and carpet grass just loves irrigation.

For several years Martha and Jim Irvine worked steadily to remove carpet grass where it moved into the native plantings. Once the Irvines were no longer able to perform this labor-intensive service, the carpet grass “carpeted” a lot of areas, where it readily soaks up lots of water. Thus, the native species are not able to perform optimally.



The photo above was taken at SPI Convention Center in early January. Notice the carpet grass engulfing an Ebony Tree’s lower branches.

In many other areas of the valley, guinea and Kleberg bluestem grass seeds take root beneath shrubs, around trees and in garden areas.

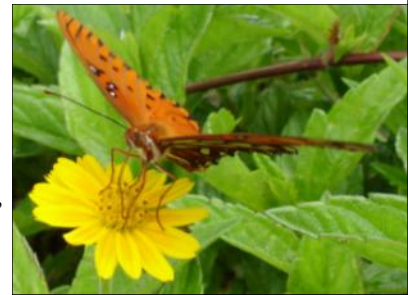
Most gardeners are unwilling or unable to stoop down and root out encroaching grasses and other unwanted species.



Above is an area planted in Frog fruit, *Phyla sp.* at the SPI World Birding Center. Apparently, the common adaptive *Wedelia trilobata* was previously planted in that area.

Although butterflies will utilize the blooms of this non-native *Wedelia*, the plant is very difficult to control and contain. In the photo above, notice the sprawling growth habit of *Wedelia trilobata*.

The image of *Wedelia trilobata* below (with Gulf Frittilary) was taken by Patty Brown in 2005 and accessed via the worldwide web. In my experience, this plant is not a real favorite of butterflies.



Many easily-grown non-native groundcovers will out-compete natives under certain growing conditions.

Asparagus fern (not pictured) is a very common problematic species.

The lovely *Setcreasea pallida* (below) is another common invader. It has no real value to local wildlife.

To remove most of these “carpeting” species, it is necessary to dig out the deeply-entrenched, rapidly-spreading and abundant roots.



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(Mike Heep)
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Perez Ranch Nursery

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Landscaper using Natives:

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Sponsors

Heep's LRGV Native Plant Nursery

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

(Fourth Tuesday each month)

Board Meetings at 6:30pm. — Speaker at 7:30pm.

2013-14 Meeting Dates:

Feb. 25th, 2014—Ken King: Cacti

Mar. 25th, 2014— Wildflowers

Apr. 22nd, 2014

May 27th, 2014



Left: Potato Tree,
Solanum elaeagnifolium,
PDST p. 401, does
well in cool, wet winter/
spring weather.
Highly useful to birds.

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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TO:

NPP Jan. meeting/speaker on:
Tues., Nov. 28th, 2013, at 7:30pm

"Why Do Some Non-Natives Become Invasive?"

by John Goolsby

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



We'll be celebrating NPP's 40th Year with refreshments at this very special meeting!!



Is your yard a bit dreary in winter? In this issue, you'll find many plants which perform well in this cool season, especially if you can provide irrigation. You may be surprised to observe the butterflies, birds and other critters which also appear.

Above: *Viguera stenoloba*, PDST p. 135. This shrub grows especially well in full sun.

This month's SABAL topic: "Winter Wonders: Native Plants With Winter Promise"