



# The Sabal

[www.nativeplantproject.org](http://www.nativeplantproject.org)

## **Thorny Natives with Edible Fruit or Seeds--**

*by Christina Mild*

Given ample space, thorny plants can be a nice addition to the landscape. Planted along property edges, they're much prettier than a fence and provide great homes for birds and protection for other wildlife. Several of our tastiest native fruits grow on thorny plants. Some, like wolfberry, grow nicely beneath a mesquite. Much of the knowledge vital to human existence, i.e., ability to find food in the wild, has been relegated unimportant status. It's

very appealing to pluck fruit from the bush if you have the knowledge of what may be safely eaten.

Ex-military men have often repeated "wilderness survival" rules to me, stating that certain colors of fruit are "always" poisonous and to be avoided. This doesn't apply to the Tamaulipan Biotic Province, in which we live, as far as I can determine. Poisonous fruits occur here in shades of blue-black, red, orange and yellow. Very tasty non-toxic fruits also exist in each of those colors. The only way to be certain that a plant is edible is to recognize that plant and distinguish it from others which are toxic.

Sorry, I can't offer any short-cut methods. Here are some of my favorites among the thorny edibles.

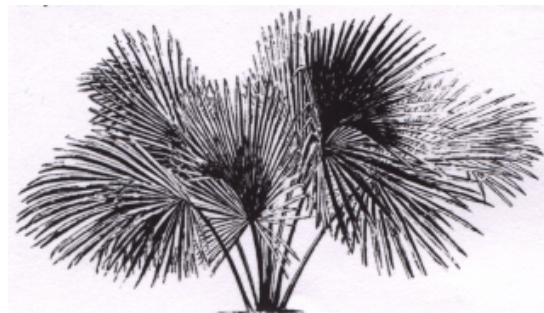
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Clifford St., Harlingen, TX 78550-8542. Mild (M.S. Biol. Sci.) volunteers in native plant restoration and preservation projects and locally-relevant natural history education. [[www.riodeltawild.com](http://www.riodeltawild.com)].

*Technical Assistance provided by Mike Heep*

Thorny “edibles”	Growing notes:	Fruiting attributes:
Brasil <i>Condalia hookeri</i>	Lime-green delicate foliage. Tree or tall hedge. Thorn-tipped branches.	Very tasty, ¼” blue/black fruit. Large-fruited specimen grows at S TX Heritage Museum in Edinburg. Fruiting after rainfall.
Brush Holly, Coronillo <i>Xylosma flexuosa</i>	Open, airy growth. Tolerates partial shade. Long thorns on central branches. Reddish coloration on new growth. Found near resacas.	Winter fruiting. ¼” fruit ripens to dark red/black. Nice specimens grow at Valley Nature Center in Weslaco. Some specimens produce multiple crops of fruit each year.
Coma, Chicle, Saffron Plum <i>Bumelia celastrina</i>	Forms colonies ( <i>comal</i> ) from roots. Shiny evergreen foliage. Very fragrant small white flowers.	Blue-black sticky fruit loved by birds. Latex in fruit led to the name “chicle.” (an organic, natural chewing gum)
Dewberry (Rio Grande) <i>Rubus trivialis</i>	Typically found near ponds or riverbanks. Prefers full sun. Butterfly nectar & host plant. Thicket-forming.	Fruit ripens to blue-black in late spring. Requires ample water for best fruiting. Delicious!
Granjeno, Spiny Hackberry <i>Celtis pallida</i>	Spread abundantly by birds. Very thorny. Difficult to control once established. Very well-suited to this area. Adaptable to many soils. Forms interesting arches.	Orange fruits taste like melon or pumpkin. Abundant fruiting after seasonal rain. Survives very well in LRGV growing conditions, too well for many gardeners!

<p>Lotebush, Clepe, Gumdrop Bush <i>Ziziphus obtusifolia</i></p>	<p>Leaves are consumed by wildlife. Leafless during drought; abundantly leafy after rain. Grows long lanky branches. Attractive foliage &amp; stems. Extremely drought tolerant. Very strong thorns.</p>	<p>Blue-black fruit can be very tasty. Best grown in remote corners away from traffic or as a specimen plant with ample space. Grows well on fences or beneath mesquite.</p>
<p><i>Biznaga de Chilitos</i>, Tom Thumb; Peanut Cactus <i>Mammillaria multiceps</i></p>	<p>Shade-tolerant, colony-forming cactus, about 1 inch in size. These grow nicely in pots. Rot-susceptible.</p>	<p>Chili-like red fruits are tart &amp; tasty. Fruiting is frequent, following rains or watering.</p>
<p>Tuna, fruit of the Nopal, Prickly Pear <i>Opuntia engelmannii</i></p>	<p>Rapid growth. Young pads form in springtime &amp; are edible. Spring flowers are gorgeous. Requires frequent trimming as maintenance.</p>	<p>Fruiting occurs throughout summer. Ripe tuna can be eaten raw after spines are carefully removed. Delicious drinks, jellies, popsicles: add ample sugar.</p>
<p>Strawberry Pitaya <i>Echinocereus enneacanthus</i></p>	<p>Native to the western parts of the LRGV. Upright columnar cactus forms colonies. Gorgeous blooms in spring. Prefers sunny location with good drainage.</p>	<p>Strawberry flavored fruit is extolled by many who have eaten it (after removing spines).</p>
<p>Wolfberry, Berlandier's <i>Lycium berlandieri</i></p>	<p>Often planted by birds, thus found under trees, along fences. Leafless in drought &amp; warty-leaved at times.</p>	<p>Very delicious small red fruits appear after every rain. Easily grown under mesquite. These thorns aren't terribly problematic.</p>
<p><b>Several leguminous trees have edible beans and/or pods</b> and sticky edible substances surrounding the beans: Mesquite, Ebony and Retama are examples. (<b>Cautionary note: some leguminous seedpods are extremely toxic.</b>)</p>		





to the left, Brush Holly



above, Chilito cactus



to the left, Coma fruit

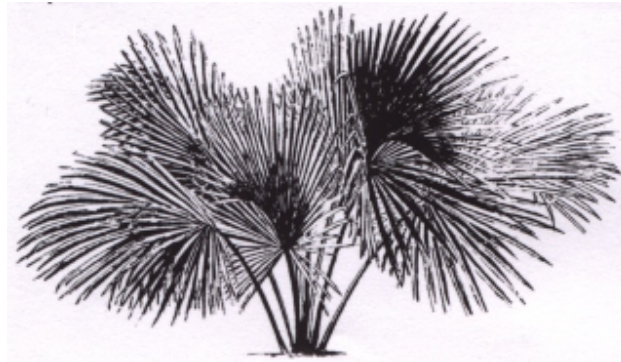


upper left, Granjeno fruit

above, purple/black tuna

to the left, Ziziphus fruit and bloom





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Native Plant Rescue: **The Valley Nature Center** will rescue native plants about to be destroyed by construction companies, developers, or no longer wanted by home owners. Call 956-969-2475.

## Nature Happenings Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas

For a comprehensive calendar of Nature Happenings go to **RGV Nature Coalition** at [www.rgvnaturecoalition.org](http://www.rgvnaturecoalition.org) Scroll down to and click on Nature Events Calendar on right side

**Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary**— Native plant presentation and tour by Joseph Krause – every weekday at 10 a.m. Pre-registration required – call (956) 541-8034. Or go to [www.tx.audubon.org/centers/sabal](http://www.tx.audubon.org/centers/sabal)

**Laguna Atascosa NWR** — Nature BIKE RIDES on Saturdays from 8 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. and Nature WALKS on Sundays from 8 a.m. - 10 a.m. Call for details: (956) 748-3607.

**Santa Ana NWR**— Guided Nature WALKS are available. Call for details: (956) 784-7500.

**Edinburg Scenic Wetlands and World Birding Center** — **Bird Walks Saturday 9:30 a.m.** Native Plant Landscaping. **Special free Saturdays.** Visit on May 26, June 30, July 29, and Aug. 25 and admission is free. 714 Raul Longoria Rd., Edinburg, TX (956) 381-9922.

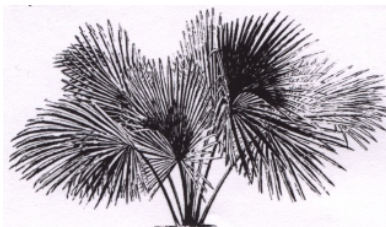
**Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park & World Birding Center** — **Butterfly, Bird and Dragonfly, and Creatures of the Night Walks** . 2800 Bentsen Palm Drive, Mission, TX Call Josh Rose (956) 584-9156 for schedule.

**Quinta Mazatlan - McAllen Wing of the World Birding Center**— Friday Morning Stroll Through History: a guided stroll at the historic adobe home built in the 1930's. \$2.00 adults. \$1.00 for seniors and children . 600 Sunset Ave., McAllen, TX Call Colleen Hook (956) 688-3370

**Valley Nature Center, Weslaco, Texas - May 17 - 20 Dragonfly Days** continue with field trips and scheduled events. 301 S. Border Avenue, Weslaco TX **Call (956) 969-2475**

**NABA Butterfly Walk** - Walk through the Butterfly Gardens every Tuesday and Saturday 10:00 - noon with Naturalist Javier De Leon. 3400 S. Butterfly Park Drive off Old Military Road, one mile east of Bentsen State Park. (956) 583-9009

**Estero Llano Grande State Park - Breakfast with the Birds** Sat. May 26, come have a light breakfast on the scenic deck overlooking wetlands followed by a guided bird walk. Reservations requested. Fee \$7 which covers the program, breakfast and park entry. Estero Llano Grande State Park World Birding Center, 3301 S. International Blvd., Weslaco, TX. Call Jennifer Owen (956) 565-3919 or [jennifer.owen@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:jennifer.owen@tpwd.state.tx.us)

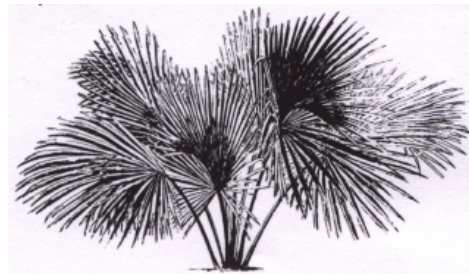


The Sabal is the Newsletter of the Native Plant Project and conveys information on the native habitat, and environment of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Texas. Co-editors: Gene Lester and Eleanor Mosimann. You are invited to submit articles for *The Sabal*. They can be brief or long. Articles may be edited for length and clarity. Black and white line drawings -- and colored photos or drawings -- with or without accompanying text are encouraged. We will acknowledge all submissions. Please send them, preferable in electronic form - either Word or WordPerfect - to: Native Plant Project, P.O. Box 2742, San Juan, TX 78589 or contact **Gene Lester @ 956-425-4005, or g-el1951@sbcglobal.net**

See *The Sabal* and our 5 handbooks on our website:  
**www.nativeplantproject.org**

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**Native Plant Project Annual Membership Application Form**

Regular \$15 per year  Contributing \$35 per year  Lifelong \$250 one time fee per individual. Members are advised of meetings, field trips, and other activities through *The Sabal*. Dues are paid on a calendar year basis. Send checks to Native Plant Project, P.O. Box 2742, San Juan, Texas 78589.

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Comments/ suggestions/ speaker recommendations should be sent to: Native Plant Project, P.O. Box 2742, San Juan, TX 78589 or contact G. Lester (956)-425-4005; g-el1951@sbcglobal.net

Native Plant Project Meetings – May 22, 2007. **Board meeting** at 6:30 p.m.; **General meeting** at 7:30 p.m. Gene Lester, Research Plant Scientist, U.S. Department of Agriculture will present a PowerPoint program on the history, present status, and likely future of agriculture/horticulture in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas.

**Board and General Meetings 2007:**

January 23	April 24	September 25
February 27	May 22	October 23
March 27		November 27

**SUMMARY OF THE MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING - April 24, 2007**

Griffin distributed a list of 32 native plant species whose photographs are needed for future PowerPoint presentations, including 5 species (cedar elm, Drummond's Turk's cap, cenizo, SPI Mistflower, and yellow water lilly) to be used on a new display board. Griffin asked for submissions of high-resolution photographs of these species by September. Hagne presented an article from the Mid-Valley Town Crier on Gene Lester's recent award of a prestigious fellowship from the American Society for Horticultural Science.

Native Plant Project  
P.O. Box 2742



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