



# The Sabal

October 2012

Volume 29, number 6

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Oct. Meeting, Native Plant Project:

**Tues., Oct 23rd, 2012: at 7:30pm**

**Arturo Longoria, Author & Naturalist,** speaks on: “Plants, Geology & Ethnobotany of the Texas Sand Sheet”

A presentation not only about the plants (in an ecological sense) but the geology of the area and how it relates to the plants found on the sheet. Brief discussion on what we know about the ethnobotany of the area, particularly regarding archival data gleaned from Spanish documents. There is also the present state of the sand sheet given about 80 years of oil and gas exploration and how this has affected the plant life.

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



*Palafoxia hookeriana*, A. Richardson photo.

More about the “South Texas Sand Sheet” from **“Plants of Deep South Texas,”** by Alfred Richardson & Ken King:

“The sand deposits on the northern boundary (of the “Valley”), referred to as the South Texas Sand Sheet, provide a different habitat. In the spring of the year this area is

popular for wildflower tours. The sand deposits, which extend down to the bedrock, are seen in northern Hidalgo County and in portions of Starr and Willacy counties. This area is different from the coastal sands. It does not have the high salt content, and the sand grains are smaller.

*(A map showing the South Texas Sand Sheet region is on page xii.)*

**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](http://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](mailto:bwessling@rgv.rr.com)>

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## Fall is Time to Plant Wildflower Seed!

— Christina Mild, SABAL Editor

As early as March 1999, readers of *The SABAL* were advised to carefully collect wildflower seed for propagation.

In this issue, we will explore the tips and tricks, successes, failures and pitfalls of propagating wildflowers.

Approximately 10 years ago, Arroyo Colorado Audubon Society carefully selected species of wildflower seed available from Native American Seed which might successfully grow, especially in the clay soils of what Richardson and King (see pg. 1) define as “River & Resaca Bottomlands and Terraces.”

Much of that seed was planted in carefully-prepared seedbeds in Ramsey Nature Park in Harlingen. Of the 11 seed species included in the mix, the following four germinated well and continued to produce seed which was distributed successfully to wider areas of the park:

- Huisache Daisy: *Amblyolepis setigera*
- Indian Blanket: *Gaillardia pulchella*
- Mexican Hat: *Ratibida columnaris*
- Tropical Sage: *Salvia coccinea*



Huisache  
Daisy

Year after year, unwary consumers (throughout the world, I presume), are misled by seed packages labeled: “Native Wildflower Seed,” “Native Seed for Butterfly Gardens,” or “Native Seed for Hummingbird Plants.” Even a “Native Texas Mix,” will not yield the closest representation of wildflower diversity for much of the landmass of Texas.

The best source for wildflower seed in this area is **Native American Seed**, located in Junction, TX. Their

catalogs provide the knowledge needed to select the best species for your chosen planting spot, within the south central U.S., according to soil type, sunlight and soil moisture.

The catalogue can be requested at no cost at: [www.seedsources.com] or 800-728-4043.

Each year, the day I receive my new catalogue in the mail is a day to rejoice!

In addition, many “wildflower” species are available from our native plant nurseries. (pg. 7)

The impetus for this month’s topical issue on “Wildflowers Around the LRGV” is *The SABAL*, Volume 16, Number 3, March 1999. In that issue, long-time editor Joe Ideker (now deceased) wrote an article entitled “**25 Common Native Wildflowers from the Lower Rio Grande Valley.**”

The uniqueness of that article is that Joe approached his subject by breaking down the LRGV into 5 areas, and talked about notable wildflower species found in each. He seems to have been led down this path of thinking as NPP planned their annual “wildflower slide show” and fieldtrip.

We are indebted to my husband, Dr. Charles Mild, for the loan of a nifty-spiffy “Fujitsu ScanSnap S1500” with included software “Scan to Microsoft SharePoint 3.3.” This marvelous technology allowed the scanning of the March 1999 Sabal issue into MS Word, which allows for copy and paste, as well as reformatting, editing, *including editorial comments in italics* and illustrating with actual photos. In Joe’s days as editor, the best he could do for illustrating a plant was to xerox black and white drawings from existing illustrated publications, which were few in number. Thus his original article included no illustrations or photos.

Though Joe is no longer among us, he has left an enormous legacy in the precise data he published in his many years as editor of **The Sabal**. He is missed, but not forgotten, nor taken for granted.

The introduction to Joe's afore-mentioned article indicates that the recent drought is nothing new:

"March 1999 again is our wildflower month with a wildflower slide show and a Sand Plain wildflower field trip. Each stop often provides over 100 species of plants, mostly blooming wildflowers. This year (1999) the closest thing to rain has been the drop which ran down through the dust on the inside of the rain gauge, but dried before reaching bottom. Any wildflowers blooming are responding to the abundant rainfall last Fall after the total lack of rainfall in Edinburg from 1 March to mid-August 1998." Joe was often hard to understand, but his sense of humor stands out in this paragraph.

He continues:

"What wildflower should one plant? i.e. where and how does one obtain seed in 1999?"

- \* Winter annuals which are fruiting after flowering through the cool months are readily available.
- \* Many mallows (often shrubs) which nectar butterflies and provide foliage to feed their caterpillars have seed.
- \* For other (*desired species*) one will have to identify specimens in flower this month, note their location, and return for the ripe seed when they mature. (Snip a flower and enough foliage that the piece can be matched post-flower to the desired plant.) The same can be done for others that mature at other times of the year. *These days we'd likely take a digital photograph, even, perhaps, with our telephone!*
- \* It is better for both the gardener and the plant to take a few seeds from several plants than all from one plant."

### Regional Recommendations

**Coastal Area.** Four excellent plants from barrier island sand dunes include:

**Beach Evening Primrose** (*Oenothera drummondii*, Onagraceae),  
**Beach Morning Glory** (*Ipomoea imperati*, Convolvulaceae),  
**Camphor Daisy** (*Machaeranthera phyllocephala*, Asteraceae), and the  
Coastal form of **Texas Palafoxia** (*Palafoxia texana* var. *ambigua*, Asteraceae).



Palafoxia

Beach Evening Primrose has large, 4-petaled, yellow blossoms that open at dusk and continue into the next day, weak woody stems, and spatulate leaves.

Beach Morning Glory creeps down sand dunes onto the beach, putting out its white, yellow-centered flowers amongst its shiny, oblong leaves as it goes.

The erect Camphor Daisy (photo on right) also grows in some inland saline areas. It has showy yellow flower heads above toothed leaves. *Richardson & King note that Camphor Weed* (photo below) *often grows in the same area. Both species may release a camphor odor when leaves are crushed.*



Camphor Daisy



Camphor Weed  
see pg. 5

Texas Palafoxia from the dunes has branches with narrow leaves and its purple flowers at the tips. I recommend the var. *texana* for the rest of the lower Rio Grande Valley. *Seed germinates well in most soils.*

Lila de los Llanos (*Anthericum chandleri*, Liliaceae) comes from the Clay Lomas and is available from native plant nurseries. It pushes up scapes of yellow blossoms from its grass-like leaves. This rare plant is losing a battle with exotic Buffle Grass for growing room and especially should not be dug from the wild. A similar species, *Echeandia texensis*, is available from Heep Native Nurseries in Harlingen. (see p 7)

### ***Eastern Lower Rio Grande Valley Area.***

In the moister eastern area (and some of these all the way across), one finds:

**Mexican Hat** (*Ratibida columnaris*. Asteraceae),

**Hierba de Zizotes** (*Asclepias oenotheroides*. Asclepiadaceae),

**Southern Pepperweed** (*Lepidium austrinum*. Brassicaceae),

**Runyon's Ruellia** (*Ruellia nudiflora* var. *runyonii*. Acanthaceae), and

**Pink Mint** (*Stachys drummondii*. Lamiaceae).

Mexican Hat has its little maroon and yellow sombreros above divided, dandelion-ish leaves. The brims are ray flowers and tiny disk flowers cover the crowns. *Once the seeds are dry, they can be separated from the cone and planted. It is a drought-tolerant plant which will grow in poor soils. Seed has a nice herbal smell.*

Hierba de Zizotes is a short, herbaceous milkweed with greenish-white or yellowish flowers that attract butterflies and large, oblong leaves that feed hungry Queen, Monarch, and Montezuma caterpillars. One needs a number of plants to raise a brood. *Perhaps because this drought-tolerant milkweed has a deep taproot, it is very difficult to transplant. If you can, collect some seed. Mature plants may be hard to find in the wild.*

Southern Pepperweed should show in the flowerbed naturally; stop pulling it. Above its toothed, lanceolate leaves, it has tiny, white flowers that quickly feed butterflies after the great freezes when nothing else blooms, followed by tiny, heart-shaped fruit. If necessary, snip off a piece with mature fruit, wrap it to contain the tiny seed, and then crush the fruit over the flowerbed. It feeds the caterpillars that specialize on Cabbage Family plants. *Young seedpods are edible and add some zip to a salad. Usually found in large colonies.*

Runyon's Ruellia is the common Ruellia of the LRGV. It has beautiful purple funnel-shaped flowers and lanceolate leaves which several butterfly caterpillars love to devour. One may have to stay home to enjoy its midday blossoms. *Long, pointed seed capsules open to release seed when hit by moisture. Collect the seed capsules and cast over a prepared seedbed. Often called "Wild Petunia." Grows easily and will form colonies.*

Pink Mint (in March) is now finishing its cool growth season and may dry up unless it gets some rain soon. It is fruiting and the seeds plentiful. On the squared mint stems the beautiful, pink, mint flowers and fruit grow in whorls on erect square stems. The leaves are ovate-oblong. *Many of the pink mint colonies which resurface year to year in Ramsey Park were "rescue" specimens from Gloor Woods in Brownsville. (see photo top right)*



Pink Mint, a great nectar plant



Hierba de Zizotes, Prairie Milkweed



Pepperweed,  
magnified



Runyon's Ruellia



Mexican Hat

## Western Lower Rio Grande Valley Area.

Here I recommend several plants growing in almost every roadside that has not been scraped, overmown, or especially out-competed by Buffel Grass and Guinea Grass. ***In 2012 very few such places still exist!***



Photos (L to R): Swanflower in bloom. Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly (Gil Quintanilla photo). Eggs on Pipevine leaf underside. Pipevine Swallowtail Butterfly larva on Pipevine.

**Swanflower (Pipevine)** (*Aristolochia erecta*. Aristolochiaceae) is a *host plant* for the pipevine-loving swallowtail *butterflies*. A mama Pipevine showed them to me as she deposited her eggs on the long, linear leaves. Shortly, I found the large centipede-shaped caterpillars. One needs a number of the smallish Swanflower plants to feed a single brood of these cats. The flowers proved bizarre.

**Camphor Weed** (*Heterotheca latifolia*. Asteraceae) produces yellow blossom after yellow blossom especially on the disturbed or saltier soils not uncommon in the LRGV. Its lanceolate leaves release a camphor scent which deters mosquitos when rubbed on skin. (See photo on page 3 for comparison with Camphor Daisy.)

**Dakota Verbena** (*Glandularia bipinnatifida*. Verbenaceae) decorates early Spring especially after moisture during the cool months when it blooms early as it did this year. It arranges lots of its showy blossoms in a flat cluster atop a sprawling plant. The leaves are quite variable, and attempts have been made to divide it into several species.

**Texas Verbena** (*Verbena halei*. Verbenaceae) is tall, erect, and few-flowered with the tiny flowers opening in succession. Few or smaller bracts are between the flowers so the elongated cluster does not appear cluttered. It has oblong leaves.

**Texas Thistle** (*Cirsium texanum*. Asteraceae) has flowerheads of pink flowers which attract many thirsty butterflies. Its spiny, dandelion-like foliage attracts numbers of caterpillars like those of the Painted Lady. *Seedheads are spiny, but worth collecting, as direct-sown seed does well. Black-backed goldfinches visit to eat the seed and perhaps to use the seed-fluff in a nest.*



Texas Thistle blooming at Ramsey Park

christina mild

### ***Sand Plain Area.***

The Sand Plain to our north extends into northern Starr, Hidalgo, and Willacy Counties. Some of its characteristic native wildflowers extend south of Linn along US 281 where many of these plants find the southern edge of their ranges.

**Texas Paintbrush** (*Castilleja indivisa*, Scrophulariaceae) has tiny flowers within its showy, bright-red bracts on erect plants with lobed leaves.

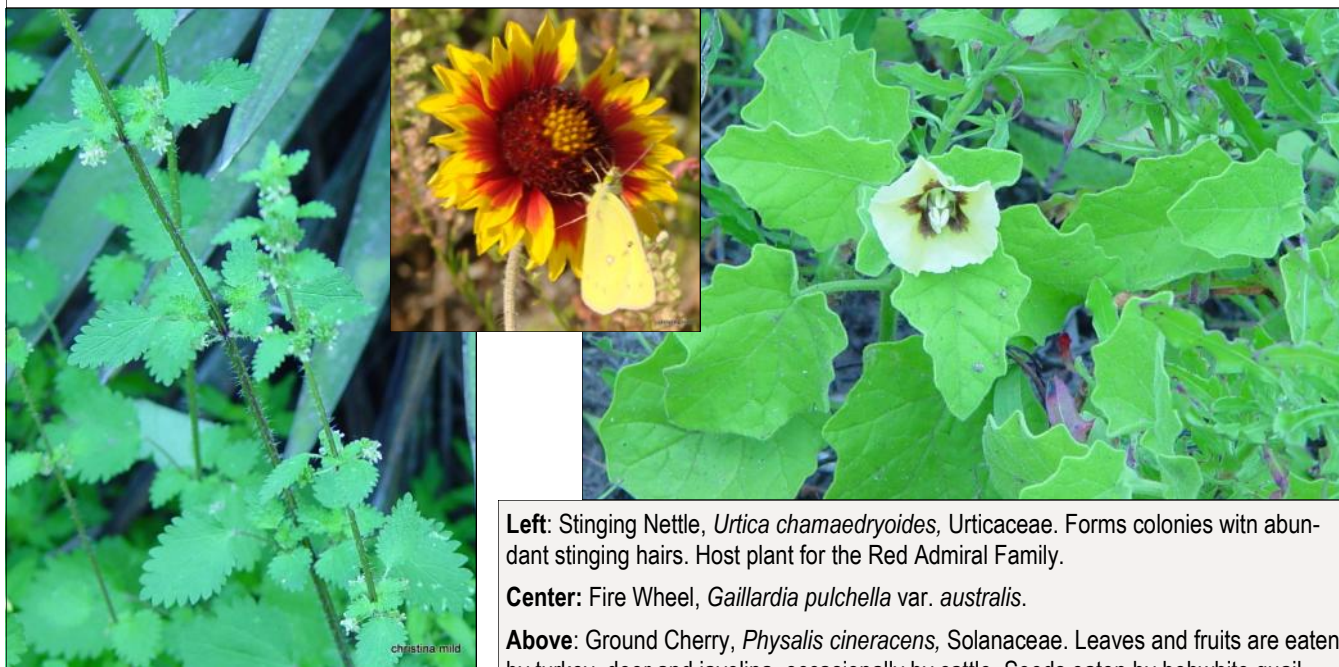
**Sand Bluebonnets** (*Lupinus subcarnosus*, Fabaceae) *This rarely seen species* has its beautiful blue bean-like blossoms but without the conspicuous white tips on the petals. Its 5-leafletted, compound leaves alone decorate a native wildflower bed. *More common is the species Lupinus texensis.*

**Sand Coreopsis**, (*Coreopsis nuceoides*, Asteraceae) has yellow ray flowers with maroon spots near their bases around brownish disk flowers. The mostly trifoliate leaves have unequal leaflets.

Our **Baby Blue-eyes**, (*Phacelia patuliflora*, Hydrophyllaceae) is an erect (or held up by other plants) plant with lobed, oblong leaves and blue, bell-shaped flowers with white centers. It also occurs in the shade on Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and in open in the San Benito area.

**Rio Grande Phlox**, (*Phlox drummondii*, Polemonaceae) features several pinkish and purplish shades with pale centers above its ribbonlike leaves. It is not uncommon amidst the other wildflowers.

*Because these are some of the most commonly-discussed wildflowers, here are a few others you may not be familiar with:*



**Left:** Stinging Nettle, *Urtica chamaedryoides*, Urticaceae. Forms colonies with abundant stinging hairs. Host plant for the Red Admiral Family.

**Center:** Fire Wheel, *Gaillardia pulchella* var. *australis*.

**Above:** Ground Cherry, *Physalis cinerascens*, Solanaceae. Leaves and fruits are eaten by turkey, deer and javelina, occasionally by cattle. Seeds eaten by bobwhite quail.

In many of the wildflowers discussed here, a little sprinkling during dry spells extends the blooming season or enhances bloom numbers. Most enjoy full Sun. All flower after rainfall and tolerate droughts. Some have been incorporated into wildflower beds for centuries (especially in Europe) and others ignored. This handful of attractive wildflowers all have some endearing aspects to recommend them. So do several hundred more native plants. Many are very showy to the eye, attractive to thirsty butterflies, food for hungry butterfly caterpillars, tolerant of the LRGV feast-or-famine rainfall cycle and temperature extremes, and suffering from habitat loss. Few grow large or tall enough for birds to nest in, but birds consume their seeds or the insects they attract.

*Photos of and additional information about each of the species discussed in this issue can be found in:*  
**“Plants of Deep South Texas,”** by Alfred Richardson & Ken King.

(Additional species from the ***South Texas Sand Plain*** will be discussed in the November issue of The Sabal.

Plants of the ***Falcon Woodland Area*** will be featured in the January issue.)

## LRGV Native Plant Sources

### **Heep's Nursery (& Landscaping)**

(Mike Heep)  
1714 S. Palm Court Drive  
Harlingen, TX 78552  
(956) 423-4513 \* By appt. only

### **Valley Nature Center**

301 S. Border Ave.  
Weslaco, TX 78596  
(956) 969-2475  
<info@valleynaturecenter.org>  
[www.valleynaturecenter.org]

### **Perez Ranch Nursery**

(Betty Perez & Susan Thompson)  
12 miles north of La Joya, TX  
(956) 580-8915  
<PerezRanchNatives@gmail.com>

### **Mother Nature's Creations**

(Billy & Sue Snider)  
2822 Nueces, Harlingen, TX 78550  
Nursery open by appointment:  
(956) 428-4897

NABA Butterfly Park  
Old Military Hwy & Butterfly Pk Dr  
Mission, TX 78552  
(956) 583-9009

Rancho Lomitas Nursery  
(Benito Trevino)  
P.O. Box 442  
Rio Grande City, TX 78582  
(956) 486-2576 \*By appt. only

Valley Garden Center  
701 E. Bus. Hwy. 83  
McAllen, TX 78501  
(956) 682-9411

### **Landscaper using Natives:**

Williams Wildscapes, Inc.  
(Allen Williams)  
750 W Sam Houston  
Pharr, TX 78577  
(956) 460-9864  
[www.williamswildscapes.com]

## *Sponsors*

### Heep's LRGV Native Plant Nursery

Owned and operated by Mike and Claire Heep  
We grow plants suited to landscaping  
and revegetation in south Texas.  
1714 S. Palm Court Drive Harlingen, TX 78552  
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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.**

Most meetings held at Valley Nature Ctr. (see above)

### **Upcoming Speakers and Topics:**

**November 27, 2012** – Diann Ballesteros -  
“Plants of Our Gulf Coast”

**January 22, 2013** – Dr. Andrew McDonald –  
"Natural History of LRGV Morning Glories"

**February 25, 2013** – Chris Hathcock –  
“The Natural Zones of the Lower Rio Grande Valley”

Other Meeting Dates: March 25, April 22, May 28, 2013

**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

Other donation: \_\_\_\_\_

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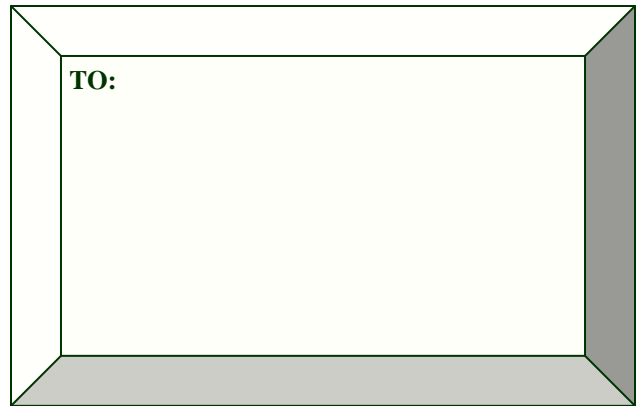
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**Tues., Oct 23rd, 2012:**  
**at 7:30pm**

*Arturo Longoria,*  
*Author & Naturalist*

speaks on:

“Plants, Geology &  
Ethnobotany

of the

Texas Sand Sheet”

**at Valley Nature Center**

**301 S. Border**

**(in Gibson Park),**

**Weslaco.**

**956-969-2475**



Photo: Woolly Globemallow, *Sphaeralcea lindheimeri*, Malvaceae. [Endemic to the Texas Sand Sheet]

Photo by Bill Carr from his website on the Texas Sand Sheet:

[<http://www.biosci.utexas.edu/prc/digflora/wrc/carr-sandsheet.html>]