Butterfly Gardening
with Native Plants
of the
Lower Rio Grande Valley,
Texas

Landscape Uses
and Identification
by the Native Plant Project
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INTRODUCTION

The Butterfly Plant Guide
An estimated 1,200 native flowering plant species grow in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas. The Native Plant Project has selected a variety of the native plants attractive to butterflies to be featured in this handbook. If plants were included in our other handbooks, we have just noted which handbook and the page number. This was done to accommodate as many new plants as possible in this handbook. All our handbooks can be read at our website www.nativeplantproject.org.

Plants native to the Lower Rio Grande Valley have advantages over plants brought in from elsewhere. Plants from this region have the genetic factors which ensure greater probability of survival. They are preadapted, having evolved to tolerate local climatic extremes, local soils, and local diseases and pests. Native plants have evolved with temperature and rainfall extremes and will require less water than exotic plants.

Using native plants in the landscape helps conserve rarer species which are vanishing due to habitat clearing. Within the four county (Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy) Lower Rio Grande Valley area over 95% of the natural habitat has been converted or cleared for urban, agricultural, or industrial use. Establishing rare species in landscapes spreads out the individuals so a single catastrophic event cannot eradicate an entire species, and it provides a reserve seed source in the event the last individuals of a species are lost from the natural habitat.

A few of our native butterfly plants are available in Lower Rio Grande Valley nurseries. Rarer ones can be found only at those specializing in Lower Rio Grande Valley natives. (See list inserted in handbook.) More and different native plants will become available if the public demands them.

The Native Plant Project (NPP)
Founded in 1982, the Native Plant Project’s purpose is to protect and conserve native plants and their endangered habitats in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and to promote the use of local native plants in local landscapes. One method the NPP uses to fulfill its mission is to disseminate information about native plants and their habitats. NPP’s definition of a native plant is one indigenous to the four-county area of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

The Native Plant Project encourages the protection of native plants through conserving and restoring native habitats in refuges, natural areas in parks and wildlife management areas, and private sanctuaries. It works to protect both natural habitat and human-influenced environments. It encourages the conservation of native species through their inclusion in local landscaping. The Native Plant Project works cooperatively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Natural Heritage Program, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and many private organizations toward protecting Endangered Species, including those local natives imperiled but yet unlisted.
BUTTERFLY GARDENING

To attract butterflies to your garden, two types of plants are needed—nectar plants and host plants. Plants that produce flowers with a high nectar content provide food for most adult butterflies. Use a variety of plants to ensure that some flowers will be blooming throughout the year. Adult female butterflies lay their eggs on host plants that will be eaten by the caterpillars. Some plants are both nectar and host plants. Some butterfly species use a variety of host plants while other butterfly species use only a single plant species. For example, the Gray Hairstreak lays its eggs on chapote, desert lantana, guayacan, and other plants. The Xami Hairstreak lays its eggs only on sedum in our area.

You can design your butterfly garden to suit the site you have selected. Most butterflies prefer lots of sunshine so your site should have an area of full or almost full sun. Most nectar and host plants also need at least part sun. Consider how much sun will be present in the winter as well as in the summer. Certain butterflies, such as the Malachite, Mexican Bluewing and Zebra Longwing, are found in the dappled shade of woodlands. Having a butterfly garden near trees increases your chance of attracting these woodland butterflies, and provides a refuge for sun loving butterflies during mid-afternoon heat.

Consider the mature height and spread of each plant when designing the garden. Allow sufficient space so that plants do not overlap or crowd each other when they mature. Usually shorter plants are placed closer to walkways and taller ones further away. If there is sufficient morning and mid-day sun in your garden, taller shrubs and trees may be planted on the west side to block the hot late afternoon sun.

While most LRGV native plants require less water than exotics, the native butterfly garden will require regular watering to keep the plants attractive and nectar flowing. Drip irrigation or soaker hoses allow water to go directly into the soil thereby conserving water and saving you time. A four to six inch layer of mulch also conserves water, keeps the soil cooler, and provides nutrients to the plants as the mulch decomposes.

Glyphosate herbicide can be used to kill Bermuda grass before planting your native garden. Of course, insecticides should not be used in the butterfly garden as they will not only kill pest insects but butterflies as well. If applying fertilizer, make sure that it does not contain an insecticide as some fertilizers for ornamental plants do.

Besides growing native host and nectar plants, you can make your garden better butterfly habitat by setting out rotting fruit in a shady spot (eaten by some adults such as the hackberry butterflies and leafwings), making a shallow water feature or moist seep for adults to obtain water and minerals, and by including a few plants with dense foliage to provide protection from wind and rain. A woodpile or rock wall offers winter protection.

When pruning the plants, examine the cut branches carefully for chrysalises or stack the branches nearby for a few months to allow time for the adults to emerge before discarding the branches.
**Carlowrightia**, Small Flowered Wrightwort

*Carlowrightia parviflora*
Acanthaceae, Acanthus family

Height: To 2½ ft  
Soil: Any  
Sun: Partial shade to full sun  
Water: Low  
Nectar plant: Fair  
Host to: Crimson Patch

**Dicliptera**, Six Angle Fold Wing

*Dicliptera sexangularis* = *D. vahliana*
Acanthaceae, Acanthus family

Height: 2 ft  
Soil: Various  
Sun: Partial shade  
Water: Low  
Will reseed to different locations; aggressive  
Host to: Texan Crescent  
Pale-banded Crescent  
Crimson Patch
Runyon’s Water Willow
*Justicia runyonii*
Acanthaceae, Acanthus family

- **Height:** 2-2 1/2 ft
- **Soil:** Various
- **Sun:** Partial shade to full sun, blooms more in sun
- **Water:** Medium
- **Nectar plant:** Good
- **Host to:** Malachite

---

Ruella, Wild Petunia
*Ruellia nudiflora*
Acanthaceae, Acanthus family

- **Height:** 1-2 ft
- **Soil:** Various, well drained
- **Sun:** Partial shade to full sun
- **Water:** Low, but blooms more with watering
- **Nectar plant:** Fair
- **Host to:** Pale-banded Crescent, Malachite, Texan Crescent, White Peacock

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Malachite

 Pale-banded Crescent
Prairie Milkweed, Hierba de Zizotes
*Asclepias oenotheroides*
Asclepiadaceae, Milkweed family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>1-1½ ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Full sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host to</td>
<td>Monarch, Queen</td>
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Queen caterpillar on Prairie Milkweed  Queen on Crucita

Swanflower
*Aristolochia erecta*
Aristolochiaceae, Dutchman’s pipe family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>Short vine, 10-12 in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>Sandy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Partial shade to full sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host to</td>
<td>Pipevine Swallowtail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pipevine Swallowtail on Mexican Wild Olive
Lazy Daisy. *Aphanostephus* species

*Asteraceae, Aster Family*

Annual that re-seeds
Height: To 18 in
Soil: Various
Sun: Full sun
Water: Low
Nectar plant: Good

![Lazy Daisy with butterfly](Image)

Reakirt's Blue on Lazy Daisy

Crucita

*Chromolaena odorata = Eupatorium odoratum*

*Asteraceae, Aster family*

Height: 3-6 ft
Soil: Various
Sun: Partial shade to full sun
Water: Low
Nectar plant: Excellent; mostly fall blooming
Host to: Rounded Metalmark

![Crucita](Image)
Betony Leaf Mistflower
Conoclinium betonicifolium = Eupatorium betonicifolium
Asteraceae, Aster family

Height: 1-2 ft
Soil: Various
Sun: Partial shade to full sun
Water: Medium
Nectar plant: Very good
Host to: Rounded Metalmark

Tiny Tim  Dyssodia tenuiloba = Thymophylla tenuiloba
and Five Needle Dogweed
Dyssodia pentachaeta = Thymophylla pentachaeta
Asteraceae, Aster family

Height: 4 inches - 1 ft
Soil: Various, well drained
Sun: Partial shade to full sun
Water: Low
Nectar plant: Fair
Host to: Dainty Sulphur
**White Mistflower**, Trailing Mistflower
*Fleishmannia incarnata = Eupatorium incarnatum*
Asteraceae, Aster family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>Climbs to 3-6 ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>Various</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Partial shade to full sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nectar plant</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
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**Bush Sunflower** *Simsia calva*
Asteraceae, Aster family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>To 3 ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Partial shade to full sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Low to medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nectar plant</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
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Pale-rayed Skipper on Bush Sunflower

**Seaside Goldenrod** *Solidago sempervirens*
Asteraceae, Aster family

See Pond Handbook, page 15
Nectar plant: Excellent; blooms summer-fall
Spring Mistflower, Blue Boneset
*Tamaulipa azurea*
Asteraceae, Aster Family

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<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>To 7 ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Partial shade to full sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nectar plant</td>
<td>Fair; mostly spring blooming</td>
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Cowpen Daisy *Verbesina encelioides*
Asteraceae, Aster family

Annual that re-seeds

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<th>Trait</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Soil</td>
<td>Various</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Full sun</td>
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<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nectar plant</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host to</td>
<td>Bordered Patch</td>
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Bordered Patch caterpillars on Cowpen Daisy
**Frostweed**  *Verbesina microptera*
Asteraceae, Aster family

- Height: 3-6 ft
- Soil: Various
- Sun: Partial shade to full sun
- Water: Medium
- Nectar plant: Very good
- Host to: Bordered Patch

![Phaon Crescent on Frostweed](image)

**Goldeneye Daisy**, Skeletonbush  
*Viguiera stenoloba*
Asteraceae, Aster family

- See Shrub Handbook, page 9
- Nectar plant: Good

**Wedelia**, Hairy Wedelia, Zexmenia  
*Wedelia texana* = *W. hispida*
Asteraceae, Aster family

- Height: To 3 ft
- Soil: Various
- Sun: Full sun
- Water: Low
- Nectar plant: Very good
- Host to: Bordered Patch

![Bordered Patch](image)
Mexican Wild Olive, Anacahuita
*Cordia boissieri*
Boraginaceae, Borage family

See Tree Handbook, page 33
Nectar plant: Very good

Taperleaf Heliotrope, Scorpion’s Tail
*Heliotropium angiospermum*
Boraginaceae, Borage family

Height: 1-2 ft
Soil: Various
Sun: Partial shade to full sun
Water: Low to medium
Nectar plant: Very good

Butterfly Bush, Tepozan
*Buddleja sessiliflora*
Buddlejaceae, Butterfly-bush family

Height: To 6 ft
Soil: Various
Sun: Partial shade to full sun
Water: Medium
Nectar plant: Good
**Sedum**, Texas Stonecrop

*Lenophyllum texanum = Sedum texanum*

Crassulaceae, Stonecrop family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Height:</th>
<th>Low ground cover</th>
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<tr>
<td>Soil:</td>
<td>Clay</td>
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<td>Water:</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host to:</td>
<td>Xami Hairstreak</td>
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**Chapote**, Texas Persimmon

*Diospyros texana*

Ebenaceae, Ebony family

See Tree Handbook, page 31

Nectar plant: Fair

Host to: Gray Hairstreak
**Vasey Adelia** *Adelia vaseyi*  
**Euphorbiaceae, Spurge family**

- **Height:** 3-10 ft
- **Soil:** Various
- **Sun:** Partial shade to full sun
- **Water:** Low
- **Host to:** Mexican Bluewing

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**Bernardia** *Oreja de Raton*  
**Bernardia myricifolia**  
**Euphorbiaceae, Spurge Family**

- **Height:** 3-8 ft
- **Soil:** Various
- **Sun:** Partial shade to full sun
- **Water:** Low to medium
- **Host to:** Lacey’s Scrub-Hairstreak

---

Mexican Bluewing

Lacey’s Scrub-Hairstreak on Goldeneye Daisy
Cortes Croton, Palillo  
*Croton cortesianus*

Euphorbiaceae, Spurge family

Height: 3-6 ft  
Soil: Various  
Sun: Partial shade to full sun  
Water: Medium  
Nectar plant: Very good  
Possible Host to: Leafwings

Low Croton  
*Croton humilis*

Euphorbiaceae, Spurge family

See Shrub Handbook, page 13  
Nectar plant: Very good  
Host to: Tropical Leafwing
Torrey’s Croton  *Croton incanus*

Euphorbiaceae, Spurge family

See Shrub Handbook, page 14
Nectar plant:  Good
Host to:  Leafwings

Partridge Pea  *Chamaecrista fasciculata* = *Cassia fasciculata*

Fabaceae, Legume family

Annual that re-seeds
Height:  To 3 ft
Soil:  Sandy
Sun:  Full sun
Water:  Low
Host to:  Cloudless Sulphur
Little Yellow
Texas Kidneywood, Vara Dulce
*Eysenhardtia texana*
Fabaceae, Legume family

See Shrub Handbook, page 16
Nectar plant: Good
Host to: Southern Dogface

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Tenaza
*Havardia pallens* = *Pithecellobium pallens*
Fabaceae, Legume Family

See Tree Handbook, page 16
Nectar plant: Good

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Scarlet Pea *Indigofera miniata*
Fabaceae, Legume family

Height: Prostrate vine
Soil: Sandy
Sun: Sun
Water: Low
Host to: Cassius Blue
Reakirt's Blue
Funereal Duskywing
Honey Mesquite  *Prosopis glandulosa*
Fabaceae, Legume Family

See Tree Handbook, page 21
Host to:  
Reakirt’s Blue

![Reakirt’s Blue on Michele’s Lantana](image)

Least Snoutbean  *Rhynchosia minima*
Fabaceae, Legume family

Height:  
Twining vine
Soil:  
Sandy, clay
Sun:  
Partial shade to full sun
Water:  
Low, aggressive with water
Host to:  
Ceraunus Blue
White-striped Longtail

![Ceraunus Blues on Crucita](image)

White-striped Longtail on Texas Lantana
Scarlet Sage. Tropical Sage

*Salvia coccinea*
Lamiaceae, Mint family

Height: 2-3 ft
Soil: Various
Sun: Partial shade to full sun
Water: Medium
Will reseed to different locations
Nectar plant: Very good

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Barbados Cherry. Manzanita

*Malpighia glabra*
Malpighiaceae, Malpighia family

See Shrub Handbook, page 22
Host to: Brown-banded Skipper
Cassius Blue
White-patched Skipper

Brown-banded Skipper on *Symphotrichum divaricatum*
Cassius Blue on Least Snoutbean
White-patched Skipper on Betony Leaf Mistflower
Lozano’s False Indian Mallow
Allowissadula lozanii
Malvaceae, Mallow Family

Height: To 5 ft
Soil: Various
Sun: Full
Water: Low
Nectar plant: Good
Host to: Texas Powdered Skipper, Laviana White-Skipper

Heartleaf Hibiscus, Tulipan del Monte
Hibiscus martianus
Malvaceae, Mallow family

See Shrub Handbook, page 22
Nectar plant: Very good
Host to: Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak
Drummond’s Turk’s Cap, Manzanilla
*Malvaviscus drummondii*
Malvaceae, Mallow family

See Shrub Handbook, page 24
Nectar plant: Very good
Host to: Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak
Turk’s-cap White-Skipper

Mallows
*Abutilon, Sida, and other genera*
Malvaceae, Mallow family

Height: Various
Soil: Various
Sun: Full sun
Water: Low
Host to: Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak
White Checkered-Skipper
Tropical Checkered-Skipper
Desert Checkered-Skipper
Laviana White-Skipper
Blue Passion Flower, *Corona de Cristo*
*Passiflora foetida*
Passifloraceae, Passion flower family

See Cacti, Ground Covers and Vines Handbook, page 32
Host to: Gulf Fritillary

Gulf Fritillary on Crucita

Corky Stemmed Passion Flower
*Passiflora suberosa*
Passifloraceae, Passion flower family

Height: Climbing vine
Soil: Various
Sun: Partial shade to shade
Water: Medium
Host to: Gulf Fritillary
Julia Heliconian
Zebra Heliconian
Mexican Silverspot

Zebra Heliconian on Texas Lantana
Slender Lobe Passion Flower
*Passiflora tenuiflora*
Passifloraceae, Passion flower family

- **Height:** Climbing vine
- **Soil:** Various
- **Sun:** Partial shade
- **Water:** Low to medium
- **Host to:** Gulf Fritillary, Julia Heliconian, Zebra Heliconian

White Plumbago, Leadwort
*Plumbago scandens*
Plumbaginaceae, Plumbago family

- **Height:** To 3 1/2 ft, sprawling
- **Soil:** Any
- **Sun:** Partial shade to full sun
- **Water:** Moderate
- **Nectar plant:** Very good
- **Host to:** Marine Blue, Cassius Blue
Coyotillo *Karwinskia humboldtiana*
Rhamnaceae, Buckthorn family

**Height:** 6 ft  
**Soil:** Various  
**Sun:** Partial shade to full sun  
**Water:** Low  
**Nectar plant:** Very good  
**Host to:** Two-barred Flasher

Dusky-blue Groundstreaks on Coyotillo

**Two-barred Flasher**

Mexican Buttonbush
*Cephalanthus salicifolius*
Rubiaceae, Madder Family

See Pond Handbook, page 32  
**Nectar plant:** Excellent

Gulf Fritillary and Olive-clouded Skipper on Mexican Buttonbrush

Gulf Fritillary and Olive-clouded Skipper on Mexican Buttonbrush
**Chapotillo**, Texas Torchwood

*Amyris texana*
Rutaceae, Citrus family

See Shrub Handbook, page 27
Host to: Giant Swallowtail

---

**Barreta** *Helietta parvifolia*
Rutaceae, Citrus family

- **Height:** 6-12 ft
- **Soil:** Various
- **Sun:** Full sun
- **Water:** Low to Medium
- **Host to:** Giant Swallowtail, Ruby Spotted Swallowtail

---

**Dutchman’s Breeches** *Thamnosma texana*
Rutaceae, Citrus family

- **Height:** 1 ft
- **Soil:** Various
- **Sun:** Full sun
- **Water:** Low
- **Host to:** Black Swallowtail

---

Giant Swallowtail caterpillar on Barreta

Black Swallowtail on Texas Thistle
**Colima**, Lime Prickly-ash  
*Zanthoxylum fagara*  
Rutaceae, Citrus family  
See Tree Handbook, page 27  
Host to:  
Sickle-winged Skipper  
Giant Swallowtail

![Sickle-Winged Skipper on Crucita](image)

**Balloon Vine** *Cardiospermum halicacabum*  
Sapindaceae, Soapberry family  
See Cacti, Ground Covers and Vine Handbook, page 33  
Nectar plant: Good  
Host to: Silver-banded Hairstreak

![Silver-banded Hairstreak on Crucita](image)

**Coma Del Sur**, Saffron-plum  
*Sideroxylon celastrinum = Bumelia celastrina*  
Sapotaceae, Sapodilla family  
See Tree Handbook, page 30  
Nectar plant: Good
Cenizo, Purple Sage

*Leucophyllum frutescens*
Scrophulariaceae, Figwort family

See Shrub Handbook, page 28
Nectar plant: Fair
Host to: Theona Checkerspot

![Theona Checkerspot caterpillars on Cenizo](image1)

Snapdragonvine

*Maurandya antirrhiniflora*
Scrophulariaceae, Figwort Family

Height: 3 ft or more
Soil: Various
Sun: Partial shade to full sun
Water: Low
Nectar plant: Fair
Host to: Common Buckeye

![Theona Checkerspot on Crucita](image2)
Woolly Pyramidbush  
*Melochia tomentosa*  
Sterculiaceae, Chocolate Family  

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<td>Water</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<td>Nectar plant</td>
<td>Good</td>
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White brush *Aloysia gratissima*  
Verbenaceae, Verbena Family  

See Shrub Handbook, page 30  
Nectar plant: Excellent

Tamaulipan Fiddlewood, Negrito  
*Citharexylum berlandieri*  
Verbenaceae, Verbena family  

See Shrub Handbook, page 31  
Nectar plant: Excellent
Dakota Vervain

Glandularia bipinnatifida = Verbena bipinnatifida
Verbenaceae, Verbena family

Height: 10 inches or less, prostrate or leaning
Soil: Various
Sun: Full sun
Water: Low to moderate
Nectar plant: Good

Desert Lantana, Brushland Lantana

Lantana achyranthifolia = L. macropoda
Verbenaceae, Verbena family

See Shrub Handbook, page 33
Nectar plant: Good
Host to: Gray Hairstreak
**Michele’s Lantana**, Hammock Lantana
*Lantana canescens = L. microcephala*
Verbenaceae, Verbena family

- **Height:** 3-8 ft.
- **Soil:** Various
- **Sun:** Partial shade to full sun
- **Water:** Low to moderate
- **Nectar plant:** Good

![Red-bordered Metalmark on Michele’s Lantana](image1)

**Texas Lantana**, Calico Bush
*Lantana urticoides = L. horrida*
Verbenaceae, Verbena Family

See Shrub Handbook, page 32

- **Nectar plant:** Very good

**Oregano Cimarron**, Redbrush Lippia
*Lippia graveolens*
Verbenaceae, Verbena family

See Shrub Handbook, page 34

- **Nectar plant:** Good
- **Host to:** White Peacock
  - Lantana Scrub-Hairstreak

![Lantana Scrub-Hairstreak on Crucita](image2)
**Common Frogfruit**, Texas Frogfruit  
*Phyla nodiflora*

**Silky Leaf Frogfruit**, Saw Tooth Frogfruit  
*Phyla strigulosa*

Verbenaceae, Verbena family

See Cacti, Vines and Ground Cover Handbook, page 24;  
*P. nodiflora* was misidentified as *P. incisa*;  
*P. strigulosa* was misidentified as *P. nodiflora*.

Nectar plant: Very good  
Host to: Phaon Crescent - *P. nodiflora*  
Common Buckeye - *P. nodiflora*  
White Peacock - *P. nodiflora* and *P. strigulosa*

**Guayacan**, Soapbush  
*Guaiacum angustifolium*

Zygophyllaceae, Caltrop family

See Shrub Handbook, page 25  
Host to: Lyside Sulphur  
Gray Hairstreak
REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING


The Native Plant Project currently holds general meetings eight times per year. Members are advised of meetings, field trips, nature festivals and other activities through *The Sabal*, which conveys information on the native plants, habitats, and the environment of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas.

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