



The Sabal

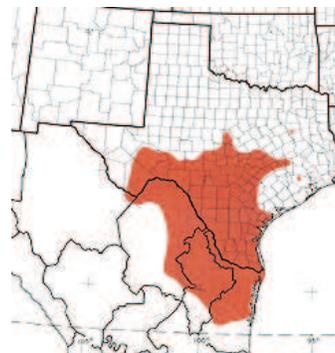
**Texas Persimmon, Chapote
Mexican Persimmon, Black
Persimmon: *Diospyros texana***

by Sue Griffin

Family: Ebenaceae

Texas Persimmon is a tree that is often overlooked when discussing trees of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Native to Texas this tree has a rather small range bordered by the Edwards Plateau on the

north, the Big Bend area on the west, northern Mexico on the south and the Gulf of Mexico on the east (see range map.)



Dark region of map represents the native range of Texas Persimmon

Texas Persimmon has been described in two different manners - single trunk trees that reach heights of 25 to 40 ft. and multi-trunked individuals that reach 8 to 12 ft. In both cases intricate branching ascends into a crown in a twisted manner. The multi-trunked trees have been described as resembling a crape myrtle in shape and structure. In the Rio Grande Valley, this tree is evergreen. Leaves are ovate, dark green, leathery and slightly fuzzy underneath. It's most striking feature is the smooth bark that peels in layers of gray, white and pink leaving interesting patterns on the trunk. This peeling is often compared to the Madrone tree of the Edwards Plateau and northern Mexico.

Texas Persimmon is dioecious: male and female flowers are on separate plants. Blooming from February to June, small, white, bell-shaped flowers develop into 1" diameter fruit on female trees only. Ripening in late summer, the dark purple or black fruit is very sweet and juicy. Although edible by man, the smallness of the local fruit and the large number of seeds makes it

unattractive to most humans. It is however, a very attractive food source for animals. In a study on the Edwards Plateau, more than 90% of carnivore feces collected between September and November contained Texas Persimmon seeds.

Drought tolerance is aided by several characteristics. The broad upward turned leaves and smooth bark serve to funnel rainwater down the stems resulting in 5.6 percent of the total precipitation over the crown of the tree reaching the root system. In addition, the thick leathery leaves help retain water. Leaves will drop in times of extreme drought and come back as soon as there is sufficient water.

Landscape opportunities are many. The multi-trunked specimens could be used to replace crape myrtles in home and commercial landscapes. It's drought tolerance makes it ideal for use in median and roadside plantings. The single trunked tree although slow growing is an ideal tree for a side yard or as a shade tree.

Mature Height: 8 to 40 ft depending on growing conditions

Mature Spread: 15 to 40 ft.

Growth Rate: slow

Sun: full sun to light shade

Soil: adaptable, all soil types, prefers well-drained soils.

Moisture: extremely drought tolerant

Blooming Time: spring

Pest and Diseases: none

Plant Character: deciduous in upper limits

Wildlife Value: Texas Persimmon provides food for deer and insects; fruit is used by humans, birds, and small mammals and it provides cover and nesting sights for a variety of birds.



Texas Persimmon trunk, flowers and fruit.

Trunk photo: Lostsprings.com/plants. Fruit & flowers photo: Texan.tamu.edu/cmplants

References:
Aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/ornamentals
Uvalde.tamu.edu/herbarium
Treeguide.com
Edis.ifas.ifl.edu/ST230
fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/tree

Sue Griffin is a life long resident of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas, an avid birder, co-owner with her husband of Mother Nature's Creations - a native plant and pond landscape business, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Native Plant Project.

Pickerelweed Family (Pontederiaceae) Species in South Texas

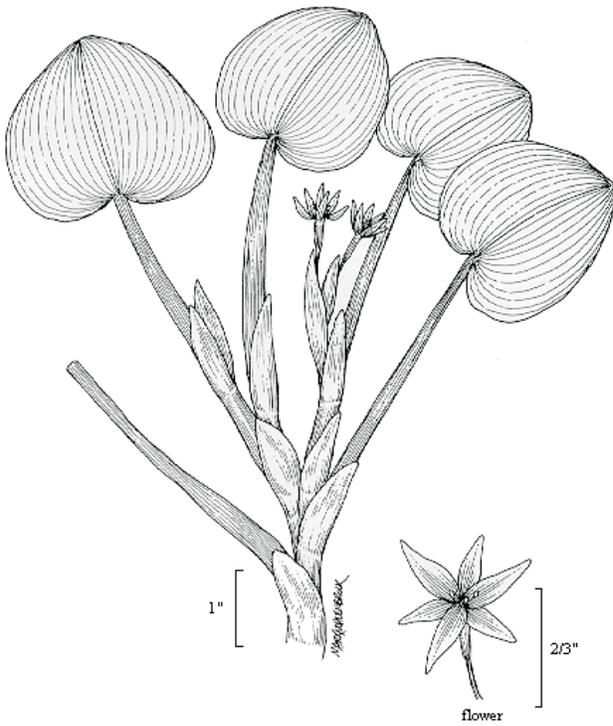
by Gene Lester

The pickerelweed family, to which the genus *Heteranthera* belongs, has three species that are worthy of notice. *Heteranthera liebmannii* (Water Stargrass), *H. limosa* (Small Blue Mud Plantain), and *H. reniformis* (Kidney-leafed Mud Plantain) are three very showy, uncommonly found, wetland/pond/aquatic plants of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

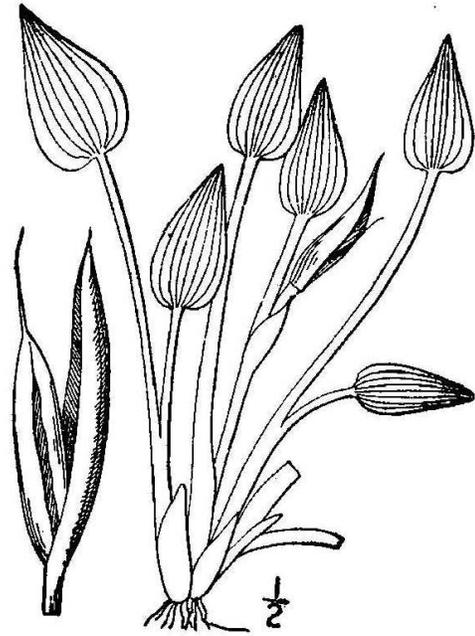
Heteranthera liebmannii (Water Stargrass) is featured in the Native Plant Project's latest handbook, *Native Pond and Wetland Plants of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, TX, Landscape Uses and Identification*. I urge you to get a copy of this handbook for the colored, identifying photographs and landscape planting information of Water Stargrass, or see the handbook at our website: nativeplantproject.org.

Water Stargrass having been featured in this handbook will not be shown here but the two remaining species *H. limosa* and *H. reniformis* will. Britton and Brown (*An Illustrated Flora of*

the Northern United States and Canada, Dover Press) describes the genus *Heteranthera* as submerged herb-type plants, rooted in mud, with creeping, ascending or floating stems; the leaves have petioles, with grass-like leaf blades (*Heteranthera liebmannii*); elongated spear-shaped i.e. lanceolate leaf blades (*H. limosa*); or kidney-shaped i.e. reniform leaf blades (*H. reniformis*). The flower's stock (spike), reaching above the water, can have one or several flowers that are more or less 2 cm (3/4 inches) wide and can be either yellow (*Heteranthera liebmannii*), white to deep-blue (*H. limosa*), or white to pale-blue (*H. reniformis*). Both *H. liebmannii* and *H. reniformis* have stems that creep along or in the mud, and root at the nodes; whereas *H. limosa* is a bunch-type plant. According to A. Richardson (*Plants of the Rio Grande Delta, University of Texas Press*) *H. liebmannii* and *H. reniformis* are found in Cameron County blooming in spring and summer, and *H. limosa* is found in Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy Counties in resacas, ponds, and ditches also blooming in spring and summer.



Heteranthera reniformis
Kidney-leaved Mud Plantain



Heteranthera limosa
Small Blue Mud Plantain

Line drawings and photo of *H. Reniformis* courtesy of USGS Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center



Kidney-leaved Mud Plantain



Small Blue Mud Plantain
photo courtesy of Gene Lester

The time to plant and transplant most native plants is rapidly coming to an end with the last of March approaching. Not only will you improve the value of your property, you'll improve its "habitat value" with native plants. Native plants attract and provide food and cover for all of our wonderful and diverse critters. Most exotics don't.

Native Plant Rescue/Tree Care: 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. For questions about trees and tree care contact the new Regional Urban Forester Paul W. Johnson 956-969-5654 or email pjohnson@tfs.tamu.edu

Exclusively Native plant sources:

Benito Trevino, Landscaper/Grower, Rio Grande City 487-4626
Valley Nature Center -- Native Plants, Weslaco 969-2475
Richard Holverson, Plants and Consulting, La Feria 797-2102
Mike Heep plants -- Wild Bird Center, Harlingen 428-2211
Mother Nature's Creations, Harlingen 428-4897



Nature Happenings in the Lower Rio Grande Valley Texas

Nature walk in Harlingen— Offered by Rio Grande Valley Chapter Master Naturalists. Tuesday, April 12th, 9:30 a.m. "Birding at McKelvey Park." This will be a rather long hike, involving a bit of a descent and climb, to observe a wide array of places where a bird might linger. McKelvey Park is near the junction of Commerce Street and 77 Sunshine Strip. Be ready to begin the tour at the parking lot, at 9:30 a.m. Call Frank Wiseman at 364-1410 to reserve a spot.

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

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.

Santa Ana NWR— Tram Tours of the park. Fees: \$3 for adults and \$1 for 12 years-old and under. Guided Nature WALKS are available. Call for details: 956-787-3079.

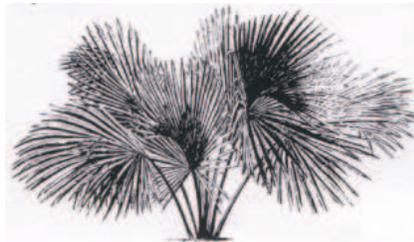
Texas State Park Tours/ World Birding Center, Mission, Texas— Rancho Lomitas Tours and other natural area tours 7:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. every Tuesday and Friday from Benson Rio Grande State Park/World Birding Center in Mission, TX. Outings focus on native plants and their uses. Fees: \$25 per person: reservations required - call 956-519-6448. Or go to www.worldbirdingcenter.org

The Sabal is the Newsletter of the Native Plant Project and conveys information on the native habitats, 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_lester48@msn.com. See *The Sabal* and our 4 handbooks on the 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.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

E-mail address _____

New Renewal Address Change

Native Plant Project Meetings – March 22, 2005; **Board meeting** at 6:30 pm; **General meeting** at 7:30pm:Our annual wildflower program will be presented by Richard Lehman, local naturalist and retired biology teacher.

Board and General Meeting 2005:

January 25 July 26
February 22 September 27
March 22 October 25
May 24 November 22

Board Meeting Only 2005:

April 26 August 23
June 28 December 27

Highlights of the NPP Board Meeting on February 22, 2005: Summary of the Minutes of the Native Plant Project Board Meeting February 22, 2005. Martin Hagne was elected as Vice President. Vacek will write a letter to the Texas Department of Agriculture to protest the inclusion of balloonvine (*Cardiospermum halicacabum*) in the Texas Agricultural Code Noxious Plant List. The board approved the 2005 budget.

Native Plant Project
P.O. Box 2742
San Juan, TX 78589

