



The Sabal

February 2026
Volume 42, number 2

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Plant species page #s in the Sabal refer to:
"Plants of Deep South Texas" by A.Richardson & K.King (PDST).

Plants of Deep South Texas has been reprinted (without revisions).

Ask your favorite bookstore or nature center to restock it!

It appears to be available at this time on Amazon.

It is also available as an ebook for Kindle.

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<mild.christina@gmail.com
Submission of relevant articles and/or photos are welcomed.

Editorial Advisory Board:
Ken King, Jann Miller,
Alfred Richardson,
Jan Dauphin.

NPP meeting topic/speaker: **Tues., February 24th, at 7 pm**

"All Tied Up: Native and Non-native Vines of South Texas
(and what do we do about them?)"
presented by — Rachael Brown

The Native Plant Project is pleased to welcome Rachael Brown as the featured guest speaker for this month's meeting. Her presentation, titled "All Tied Up: Native and Non-native Vines of South Texas (and what do we do about them?)", will explore one of the most dynamic plant groups in our region. From delicate native climbers that support wildlife to aggressive species that can overtake entire habitats, vines play a powerful role in shaping South Texas landscapes. Drawing from her volunteer work in habitat management at Frontera Audubon Society, Brown will offer insight into the ecological impact of vines and invite attendees to think more critically about the plants that wind their way through our gardens, fences, and forests.

Brown has called the Valley home since 1996. Early in her career, she helped oversee the restoration of the Native Plant Garden at the Museum of South Texas History alongside noted nurseryman Mike Heep — an experience that sparked her continued interest in the intersection of environment, cultural arts, and the local economy. She is a member of the South Texas Border Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists and currently teaches Art at South Texas College Mid-Valley Campus.

In a region where habitat management and invasive species remain ongoing challenges, this program offers an engaging opportunity to better understand the vines that tie our landscapes together — for better or for worse.



The Sabal is the member newsletter of the Native Plant Project.
It conveys information on native plants, habitats and environment
of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas, "Deep South Texas."

Common Names: Try Using the Vernacular — Editor's Comments

It has become common for native plant aficionados to use the common names found on iNaturalist. This is confusing for many of us, as iNaturalist often uses bizarre common names not in common use in this area (and perhaps not anywhere).

In my opinion, the best names to use are **vernacular** names:

Vernacular—"the language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people in a particular country or region"

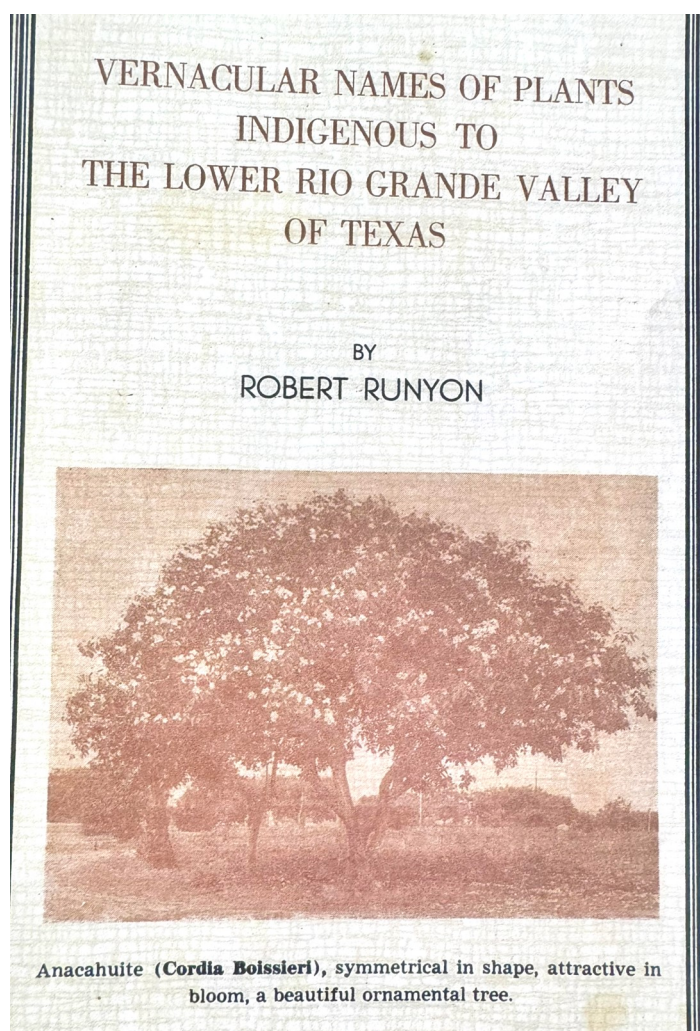
In this area vernacular names are most often from Amerindian languages or from Spanish.

These names honor those who came before us, those who lived with these plants for centuries and knew their properties and uses.

Elzada Clover was one of the first botanical scholars to publish these names in a botanical journal and to promote their appreciation and usage (rather than making up new names in English).

Robert Runyon published a book on the subject and Drew Bennie has enlisted Don Ely at "Allegra Printing" of Harlingen to reprint this volume. It will be available at NPP's February meeting.

The next step in making these names easier to find is to scan the content in a way that can be searched, not as an image file, but as readable text. Is anybody out there capable and willing to do so?



Special thanks to Allegra Printing in Harlingen and especially to owner Don Ely for his assistance with reprinting the Robert Runyon booklet on Vernacular Names.

The Perils of Pruning—Christina Mild

After January’s freezing weather, it’s tempting to trim off everything which looks dead. There are many reasons to resist this temptation. Among them, think back to Ernest Herrera’s talk on native bees. Some of them lay eggs in what we might see as “dead” stems. There are many other reasons to leave things alone, perhaps until late March.

— we may have another freeze, just when we expect it least.

— it takes some time for plants to form new leaf and bloom buds, especially during such dry weather. Give the plant a chance to recuperate! (Dr. Al Richardson recommends scratching a branch to look for living green tissue.)

— animals may still be hanging out in this area which you see as dead. They may be finding seeds or insects which you don’t notice.

— what you see as dead may, in fact, be alive but dormant. (Berlandier’s Wolfberry is a great example. See page 4.)

— what you see as dead may be the stem of a vine which is very much alive. (*Passiflora suberosa*, for example.)

Now you have 6 reasons to avoid unnecessary and destructive yardwork which you can delay for another month!

Passiflora suberosa, (now *P. pallida*) Corky-Stem Passionflower Vine. PDST 347.

Ken King first pointed out this corky stem to me. Several people had unknowingly trimmed these stems back at various nature centers, forcing the plant to regrow from the roots. The stem of my *Passiflora suberosa* was about 10’ below the obvious green leaves and mature fruit in the center photo. Anyone who was trimming dead stuff from the ground below this shrub would have likely ended a continuous fruit supply which attracts mockingbirds year-round.

This experience suggests that a simple rule is NOT to trim “dead” stems arising from the ground, especially in the case of vines.

Eventually, trimming back dead stems growing UP from living shrubs after freeze damage is acceptable.

Note the small but beautiful blooms on Jann Miller’s photo below. Her photo also shows the twining nature of this easily-grown native vine. Locally, it can be found in Cameron and Hidalgo counties. It is not found elsewhere in Texas. It is more abundant in Mexico.

This passionflower vine is a host plant for Heliconia, Gulf Fritillary and Mexican Silverspot butterflies.



It prefers to grow up into shrubs and trees, but can be grown on trellises.

The corky stem develops on old specimens.



Lycium berlandieri. PDST 394.

Common Name: Berlandier's wolfberry. Perennial Shrub. Tomato/Potato family.

General: Sparsely thorny, sparingly branched shrub, to 2.5 m tall, with a reclining or spreading growth form; branches glabrous to hairy, very gray to reddish, somewhat crooked, flexulous.

Leaves: Alternate and fascicled; blades flattened, glabrous, linear to ovate-spatulate, 1-15 mm long by 1-5 mm wide.

Flowers: Solitary or in clusters of 2-3 in leaf fascicles, on pedicels 3-20 mm long; calyx cup-shaped, 1-3 mm long, topped with 3-5 deltoid (triangular) lobes about 1/3 as long as the calyx tube, each lobe tipped with small tuft of hair; corolla white to pale lavender, 4-7 mm long, funnel-shaped, constricted immediately above the ovary, and flaring markedly at the top, tipped with 4-5 lobes, these usually reflexed; lower 1/3 to 1/2 of filaments fused to inside of corolla and densely hairy at just above fused portion; stamens usually protruding, rarely enclosed by corolla.

Fruits: Nearly spherical berry about 4 mm in diameter, red, fleshy and many seeded. Tasty and edible.

Ecology: Found on alluvial plains and rocky foothills slopes, below 3,000 ft (914 m); flowers spring through fall, but occasionally other times.

Distribution: s CA to TX, OK; south to MEX.

C. Mild's notes on the plant. (More Perils of Pruning)

Fruits on this sprawling shrub are edible for man and beast. They're tasty, related to tomatoes and potatoes. They were eaten by Amerindians, and added to several types of foods, no doubt providing vitamin C.

At one time, Hugh Ramsey Nature Park had many specimens of this plant, usually beneath favorite bird perches. We would take tours past these plants and offer fruits to our guests. Children are especially fascinated with fruits they can pick for themselves, and were eager to learn the plant's name and look for it elsewhere in the park.

Alas, I can no longer find many specimens of Berlandier's Wolfberry in the park, probably because it has been cut back to the ground. Why? Frequently, this species drops all of its leaves. This is perhaps due to drought, but may be for other reasons. In any case, I have had to stop people many times from cutting this species back to the ground, when the plant appeared to most observers to be "dead" and unsightly.



Photo above by Javier Gonzalez.
In some seasons, wolfberry is covered with hundreds of blooms. Fruiting can be plentiful.



Photo on left by Josue Salazar.
The tasty fruits hang from a cute "cap."

Note: Dr. Richardson and Ken King have found yellow-fruited specimens near the Salt Lakes.



This dead-appearing wolfberry specimen was left unmolested, only under constant guard, and has lived to bear a few fruits. It had just a few leaves on the youngest branches when one area of Ramsey Park was recently "cleaned." Photo by C. Mild.

Sponsors (Native Plant Nurseries)

LRGV Native Plant Sources

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
(956) 457-6834 <heep0311@yahoo.com>
Heep's Nursery is on Facebook



Perez Ranch Nursery
(Betty Perez)

12 miles north of La Joya, TX
(956) 587-2149

<PerezRanchNatives@gmail.com>



Nursery/Landscaper/Educator: RGV Natives!

Prickly Pair RGV

Owners: John & Stephanie Brush

Native Plant Pickup or Delivery
In-Person or Virtual Consult for Landscape Design
Educational Programming

Contact at: <prickly.pair.rgv@gmail.com>
or use the contact form at [<https://prickly-pair-rgv.com/>]

Nurseries/Landscaper selling Natives & Exotics:

Oleander Nursery (Seth & Candi Welliver)

Follow their Facebook page for updates!

2421 S Conway Ave, Mission, TX 78572
Candi 956-569-2367.

<Oleandernursery@gmail.com>

Open 10am-5pm Sat.-Sun. By appointment on weekdays.

National Butterfly Center

Old Military Hwy/3333 Butterfly Pk Dr.
Mission, TX 78572

[<http://www.nationalbutterflycenter.org>]

Rancho Lomitas Nursery (Benito Trevino)

P.O. Box 442, Rio Grande City, TX 78582
(956) 486-2576 *By appt. only

Landscaping, Etc. Inc., Noel Villarreal
125 N. Tower Rd, Edinburg;
956-874-4267, 956-316-2599

Photos on the bottom of this page are from iNaturalist, posted by Doug Goldman, Botanist, United States Department of Agriculture.

They are closeups of *Lycium berlandieri*, showing details of bloom structure and stem characteristics.

Note that blooms and leaves arise from the same node.

Thickened, succulent leaves are also noticeable.

See the related article on page 4.

NPP Board & General Meetings
are held at Valley Nature Center

(4th Tues. each month,
except December & thru summer)

Brd Mtgs 6 pm — Speaker 7 pm

Upcoming meetings: 2026:

March 24, April 28, May 26.



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

NEW: Student \$5/yr. (high school or college)
Regular \$20/yr. Contributing \$45/yr
Life \$250 one time fee/person
“Awards” fund donation: _____

Are your dues current? Membership year is Jan.-Dec.

Please print:

Name _____

Address _____

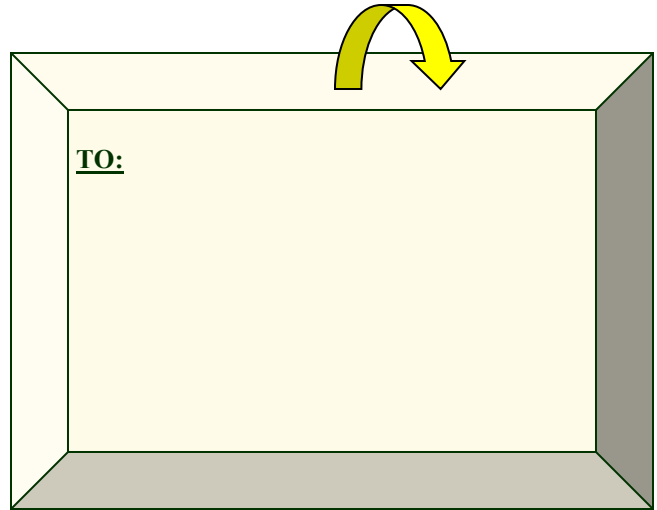
City _____ State _____

Phone _____ Zip _____ - _____

I'm choosing the “green option!” **Send my SABAL via .pdf file to:**

Email: _____

Please mail this form with dues check payable to:
Native Plant Project, POB 2742, San Juan, TX 78589-7742



Doors open at 6:30pm for refreshments and conversation.

This is our annual Membership meeting, at which we vote on several board members.

We hope you will join us!

Board members up for re-election:

Josue Ayala, Christina Mild, Jann Miller, Lizz Romero, Kathy Sheldon, Joshua Torres.

NPP meeting/speaker:

Tues., February 24th, at 7 pm

“All Tied Up: Native and Non-native Vines of South Texas
(and what do we do about them?)”
presented by — Rachael Brown

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

Feel free to bring a native plant for I.D.
Native Plants are available for a donation.
(Please be generous!)

We encourage donations of plant pots, seeds,
and cuttings of native plants.



Plant Species Featured in this issue:

Lycium berlandieri, *Passiflora suberosa*.

Photo above by Josue Ayala. Berlandieri's Wolfberry, edible fruits. See article p4 and photos p5.