



# The Sabal

May 2026  
Volume 42, number 5

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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.

**Editor:** Christina Mild  
<mild.christina@gmail.com>  
Submission of relevant articles and/or  
photos are welcomed.

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

## **Native Plant Project (NPP) Board of Directors**

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**NPP meeting topic/speaker: Tues., May 26th, at 7 pm**  
*"Replacing Guinea Grass" presented by — Christina Mild*

Mild has been working to replace guinea grass (and increase diversity) at Harlingen's Ramsey Park since 1993. She will discuss natives which have successfully replaced guinea grass, as well as a few failures along the way. Mild has worked with a low to nonexistent budget. She works with nature, planting in wet seasons and watering in dry times (to augment survival and food for wildlife). She rescued plants from Brownsville to Raymondville and Rio Grande City and collected seed throughout deep south Texas. After a deeply-cut index finger and surgeries to remove encysted thorns, she is finally exercising caution in the Tamaulipan thornscrub.

Christina has been learning and teaching about deep South Texas native flora and fauna since 1990. She worked for Valley Nature Center circa 1996, where she met a wide array of quirky characters involved in environmental efforts.

She is grateful for the wisdom and knowledge of former Billie MacWhorter and Dr. John Hoverson. Mike Heep, Al Richardson, Ken King and Jann Miller have been generous in sharing plants and knowledge for many years.

Mild continues to be inspired by participants on Facebook groups, NPP attendees, iNaturalist Observers and Identifiers, and Joey Santore's many posts and amazing photos.

Mild's background includes an M.S. in Biological Science and ten years teaching high school science (students dubbed her "la Mild"). She has been able to volunteer full time since 1998, teaching and writing about local natural history and working on revegetation projects.

### The program will take place at:

Valley Nature Center, 301 South Border St. in Weslaco, behind Gibson Park.  
The public is invited, and admission is free.

For more information about the Native Plant Project,  
visit <https://nativeplantproject.com>  
or follow us on Instagram @plantsofdeepsouthtx.



Angela Rojas captured Mild's old lady balancing technique on a fieldtrip to Harlingen's Thicket (led by Josue Salazar and organized by Josue Ayala).

Mild has been reinvigorated by NPP's younger members and nature enthusiasts. Note: protective woven helmet, hand tool for rising from a squat, clippers hung on the belt, ancient SAS shoes and 20-yr old rip-stop nylon pants.

**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."

Previous **Sabal** issues are posted on our website [[www.NativePlantProject.org](http://www.NativePlantProject.org)].



Walker's Manihot, Walker's Manioc  
*Manihot walkerae*. Euphorbiaceae. PDST 226.

The specific name honors amateur botanist Thelma Ratcliff (Mrs. E. J.) Walker, who discovered the type specimen near Mission and La Joya, Texas in 1942. For many years, this was the only known specimen.

Walker's manioc populations occur in Starr and Hidalgo counties, Texas. Populations also occur in northeast Mexico. This species occurs on state and federal lists of endangered plants. Land clearing and roadside mowing have contributed to this plant's rarity. Animals may also be involved. From Richardson and King: "The tubers are dug up and eaten by feral hogs." This editor's guess is that Javelina probably eat them, too.

**Occurrence:** sandy, calcareous soil, shallowly overlying caliche and conglomerate of the Goliad Formation on rather xeric slopes and uplands.

**Flowers & Fruit:** Male flowers are about 1/2 inch (1.3 centimeters) long, white with light purple streaks and almost tubular in shape. The 3/8 inch (0.95 centimeters) long female flowers occur at the base of the male flower stalks. The fruit is a dry, globular capsule about 1/2 inch long (1.3 centimeters) which occurs on a slightly downward curved stalk and contains three seeds. The seeds are round or slightly flattened and gray with small irregular dark spots.

**Morphology:** Specimens can reach up to six feet (1.83 meters) in height. Leaves have up to five lobes that may be shallowly or deeply indented. The narrow stems are smooth and grayish brown. The tuberous roots of Walker's manioc measure up to ten inches in length and four inches in width and resemble carrots or turnips.

**Identification:** All parts of the plant smell of cyanide. Close relatives are cultivated to produce tapioca; the starchy roots of cultivated Manihot species must undergo treatment to leach out the toxic cyanide.

Commercial growers see potential in our unique species for protective genetic characteristics.

**Propagation:** Jann Miller has been growing Walker's Manioc for many years. She provided these insights: "I've propagated Manihot both from cuttings and from seed. The seeds were collected with permission from a wild population on private property. Then I was able to prune the plants I propagated, and propagate the cuttings as well as the seeds. The best time for successful propagation with no special pretreatment is in the cooler months, with early spring being the best. I just stuck the cuttings directly into pots of soil."

This is another species unique to south Texas and northern Mexico which can best be protected by individuals growing it away from development, roadside mowing & invasive grasses.



Above: photo by Jann Miller shows healthy leaves, several blooms and bloom buds on a specimen growing in her yard.

Left: Joey Santore's photo shows the complex node with several developing leaves and bloom buds emerging.



Left: photo posted on iNaturalist by Aidan Campos shows a developing ovary in the center of a female bloom.



Bottom Left: Further development of the ovary into a striped green fruit, with the remaining bloom structures darkening to red. Photo by Joey Santore



Purple Bean Vine. (photos by Jann Miller from her yard)  
*Macropitilium atropurpureum*. PDST 266.

Indigenous to the tropical and subtropical regions of North, Central, and South America, as far north as Texas in the US and as far south as Peru and Brazil. It has been introduced for use as food for stock to many tropical regions around the world. *M. atropurpureum* is commonly used for cattle pastures intercropped with grass, used in hay, or as a ground cover to prevent soil erosion and improve soil quality.

This vine is primarily grown for its high protein content. Protein accounts for about 16% of the plants' dry matter. Primary amino acids include aspartic acid and proline. It is also a good source of calcium, potassium, and manganese.

You may find this species listed as **INVASIVE** in many sources on the internet. Many of our natives have been given this ugly moniker where they've been introduced around the world.

*Macropitilium atropurpureum* is not invasive in deep south Texas.

This species is rarely encountered in Texas, usually growing in sand around the coast, but also in Presidio County in West Texas.

Since 2018, there have been 28 observations of this species (21 observers) posted on iNaturalist for this area: many are cultivated specimens.

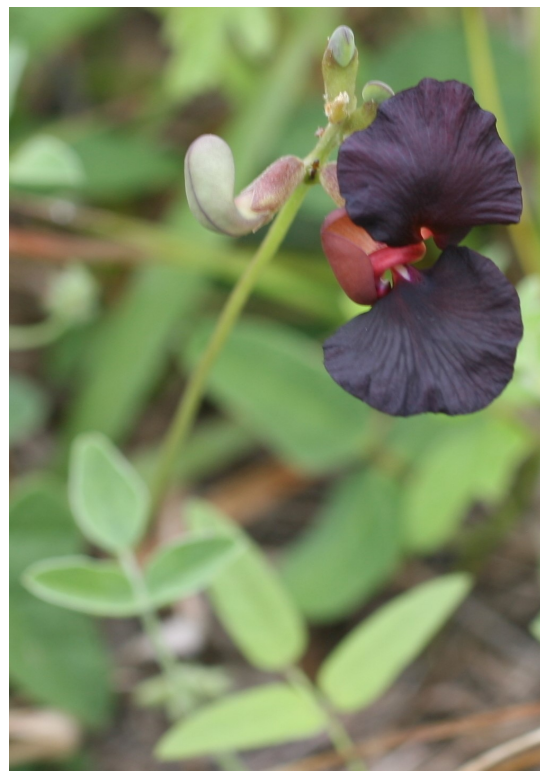
**Soil & Temperature requirements:** Purple Bean Vine has the ability to grow and prosper in varied soil types. It can be grown in soils that are coarse and fine, as well as all variations between.

*M. atropurpureum* can grow in soils with a pH level as low as 5.0 and as high as 8.0. It can also survive in most temperatures, requiring a minimum temperature of 23 °F, and has an average salinity and shade tolerance. It requires average precipitation between 15 and 111 cm.

**Habit:** Perennial twining vine, sometimes hairy. A deep-rooting legume. *M. atropurpureum* forms a deep swollen taproot up to 2 cm in diameter.

**Growth, Blooming & Natural Propagation:** Growth varies geographically, but generally occurs in warm temperatures. Blooms typically appear in spring. Stem nodes close to the soil may root, enabling vegetative propagation. In nature, the legumes burst to disperse seeds with some force.

**Local Availability:** Mike Heep has provided this purple-blooming twining bean vine for several years. He collected seed from the Southmost area near Brownsville and received seed from Ken King and Jann Miller. Good genetic diversity arises from seed sourcing at multiple sites.



Jann Miller grows this species in very large pots. Here are some insights from her experience:

Purple Bean Vine can be easily propagated from seed. In fact, it produces many seeds. The pods will pop open in my pockets before I can get them into the house. Ken King and I collected the original seed from the roadside along Highway 4 just before it reaches Boca Chica Beach years ago. They were just beginning to break ground for SpaceX, and we felt that those plants were in imminent danger. I began giving Mike Heep seeds a few years back when my seeds became mature plants. I assume that his plants may have come from that original seed stock.

Status near SpaceX: Rhett Raibley observed this species blooming on state park property near SpaceX on Oct. 20, 2024. He has not returned to document their survival.

South Texas Ecotourism Center: This would seem a perfect spot to cultivate Purple Bean Vine and other species unique to deep South Texas coastal areas.



Above left: Bloom photo by Ken King.

Above center: Cat Traylor captured this photo as the bloom was closing, developing very nice coloration.

Photo below by Cat Traylor shows the growth habit of this unique cactus species. It had produced prolific blooms by May 15, 2026.



Queen of the Night, Vining Moonlight Cactus  
*Selenicereus spinulosus*. PDST 172.

Occurrence: Recent observations on iNaturalist show several cultivated specimens of this cactus in south Texas. Many observations of wild specimens are posted from a wide swath of Mexico, especially near the central mountain range.

In deep south Texas, it has not been observed outside of cultivation in recent years. Billie MacWhorter, formerly of Weslaco, reported finding it in brush near the mouth of the Rio Grande and taking cuttings from that plant. Jann Miller has provided cuttings at several NPP meetings.

Many photos on iNaturalist and elsewhere show great networks of this vine-like cactus filling the canopy of trees. John & Audrey Martin have a large colony at their property NE of Edinburg; John planted it many years ago. Ken King has heard of colonies growing on lots in Edinburg. They were probably planted.

Habit: Narrow (3/4" wide) stems clamber onto any support, producing aerial roots. Roots also extend into soil. Spines are 1/16" or less.

Flowers: Open at night, white or pinkish, 3.5" wide or larger. Joey Santore describes the smell as divine.

Bloom Period: Spring, summer.

Fruit: Yellow or red and very spiny, though spines brush away easily when fruit is ripe.

Local Distribution: Cameron County.

Current Status: This cactus does well in cultivation, especially on existing mesquite trees. It is easily grown from even a small cutting. As Joey Santore points out in the video highlighted below, many species will only continue to exist in this area if we keep them in protected spaces, including our yards.

Cuttings planted at Ramsey Park were very attractive to javelina, which poked their snouts below a fence to consume them.

The left-hand photo was taken by Cat Traylor and submitted to iNaturalist. Cat provided this back-story:

“My brother got cuttings from a cactus growing wild in an empty lot by his in-law’s house in Kingsville, TX about 45 years ago. Dad planted it in the ranch front yard in San Isidro, TX back in the 1980’s. As far as my sister-in-law remembers, the cactus had been growing up a tree in Kingsville, TX in that vacant lot since the early 1960’s.”

See also: Joey Santore: YouTube  
“This Cactus Grows in Trees,”  
Crime Pays But Botany Doesn’t. April 16, 2023.

## 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>



#### 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:

September 22, October 27, November 24.

#### 2027:

January 26, February 23, March 23, April 27, May 25

#### La Floresta Native Nursery

David Laughlin

956-410-9034;

2506 Emerald Lake Dr.

Harlingen, TX 78550

Available by appointment.

<laflorestahoney@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: <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 apt. only

Landscaping, Etc. Inc., Noel Villarreal

125 N. Tower Rd, Edinburg;

956-874-4267, 956-316-2599

#### NPP Awards 2026:

Applications for NPP's 2026 Awards will be available on our website by June 30, 2026.

Completed applications are due by September 30, 2026.

Awards will be presented at our November 24, 2026 meeting.

#### NPP Criteria to be used in selecting a College-Level Scholarship applicant:

Preference will be given to students who:

- demonstrate knowledge of the unique flora and fauna of Deep South Texas or adjoining Tamaulipas.
- will be studying in south Texas or adjoining Tamaulipas.
- have volunteered or worked in south Texas or Tamaulipas environmental projects.
- have not previously received this award.



Above: Aaron Guerra, 2024 Propagation Award recipient.

#### Native Plant Propagation Grant: Clarification:

Propagation involves growing plants, usually from seed or from cuttings.

(Buying plants, creating gardens and/or garden maintenance do not qualify for this grant.) Applicants will be asked to share which native species they

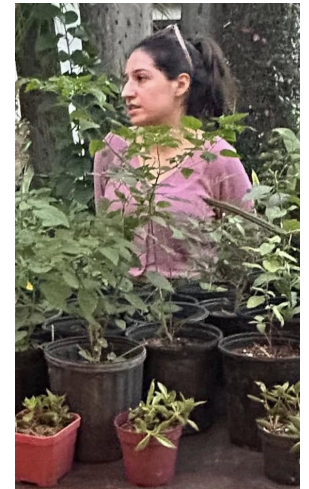
plan to grow and propagation techniques they will employ.

Propagation Grant Awardees may reapply for this grant if they have demonstrated success in propagation.

The NPP Board is very pleased with the results of offering these awards. It has allowed us to become familiar with several young people who are very involved within our growing community of nature enthusiasts!

Both of the 2024 Propagation Award recipients have provided plants for sale at NPP meetings and at many local events. They have achieved exactly what NPP has been hoping for.

We look forward to seeing the results of NPP's 2025 Propagation Awards in the near future.



Above: Catarina Miranda, 2024 Propagation Award recipient.

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**TO:**

**NPP meeting/speaker:**  
**Tues., May 26th, at 7 pm**



*“Replacing Guinea Grass”*

*presented by —  
Christina Mild*

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.

**NPP Awards 2026:**

Applications for NPP’s 2026 Awards will be available on our website by June 30, 2026. See page 5 for more detail.

Photo Right: David Laughlin

**Coming in the September Sabal:**

Plant Propagation: an article by Dr. David Laughlin.

Laughlin recently opened La Floresta Nursery in Harlingen. (See p5)



**Plant Species Featured in this issue:**

*Macroptilium atropurpureum, Manihot walkerae, Selenicereus spinulosus.*