



The Sabal

October 2023
Volume 39, number 7

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

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Submissions of relevant
articles and/or photos
are welcomed.

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NPP meeting topic/speaker: **Tues., October 24th, at 7:30pm**

“Rio Grande Valley Pollinator Project” *presented by* — Susan Upton

Join us for our October meeting as we welcome The Rio Grande Valley Pollinator Project from the Rio Grande Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist.

This project was formed as a result of concerns over lack of habitat for pollinators during the 2022 Monarch Butterfly tagging season. By simply reaching out to like-minded individuals within the community, the Rio Grande Valley Pollinator Project has taken off and through Awareness, Outreach, and Conservation, they have established a conduit to get the tools needed into the hands of family, friends, neighbors, and community partners so they too, can participate in making a positive difference.

Come join us to hear their presentation on how they got started, the amazing difference they are making within our community, and how to get involved!

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



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].

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>

Texas Master Naturalists (TMN) Annual Conference, McAllen Convention Center, October 2023
Ramsey Nature Park in Harlingen and Regional Specialty Plants of Deep South Texas. —by C. Mild

We have two TMN Chapters in deep south Texas. They have transformed the area tremendously.

TMN chapters provide an excellent series of public lectures, recruit able-bodied volunteers for all sorts of environmental work, and provide excellent training and organization for those volunteers.

I was asked to make a presentation to the annual conference on the long-term TMN project at Ramsey Park, transforming and revegetating an unregulated city dumpsite.

Barbara Peet and I created a tour of the park as well. In my mind, we would need a “hook” to recruit participants, in light of the myriad natural areas one might visit in this area. (Our tour was filled to capacity overnight.) I created a list of plants one may find in Ramsey Park which are found in Texas only in this deep south region. That list appears on page 3.

It was interesting to answer questions and hear comments to the presentation and the tour.

Participants were very interested in the methods we used for Ramsey revegetation and our relationship with the city, which owns the park. They were interested in how we organized volunteers, trained and encouraged city workers and our interactions with the public who visit the park. Several audience members are currently involved in similar projects, though none were working in an abandoned dump site. It appears that we who volunteer at Ramsey own that dubious honor.

Those who toured the park with us were not terribly concerned about plant rarities. Many had visited the park regularly on their own, yet they were happy to pay for the experience of our guided tour. They were even willing to make the hair-raising drive between McAllen and Harlingen. (That route is currently under massive construction.) They used the tour to ask numerous questions about everything, including bird calls and the identity of any plant which caught their notice.

One of my favorites from the list on page 3 is *Xylosma flexuosa*, Brush Holly. It may bloom and fruit at any time during the year when moisture is sufficient. The tiny, tasty purple-black fruits are sometimes available at times when other fruits are in short supply. They are some of my favorite snacks.

An article on Brush Holly appears on pages 4-5.

(C. Mild photos below: ripening fruit, new reddish foliage, stems and long thorns of Brush Holly.)



In researching Brush Holly, I rediscovered an older issue of *The Sabal* which includes an excellent article by Bill Carr, one of Texas’ best experts on native species throughout the state.

Bill’s article is well worth reading, or re-reading. His list of our specialty plants is much more comprehensive than mine. He addresses our area as environmental zones where specific species may be found. Bill’s article was published in:

The Sabal, May 2017, Volume 34, number 5.

“Texas at the Edge of the Subtropics”—by Bill Carr, pages 2-6.

A Look at the Rare and Northern-Limital Plants of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Bill’s article appeared earlier in the Native Plant Society of Texas News, Vol. XVII, number 5, Sept/Oct 1999 and was reprinted in *The Sabal* with the permission of the author.

In composing the list of specialties found in Ramsey Park, I was surprised to notice four species of Croton which grow abundantly in many local nature parks and private gardens.

A short photo essay on those Crotons, and how to distinguish them, appears on page 6.

Species Unique in Texas to Deep South Texas: Commonly Grown or Frequently Encountered in the Wild		
Botanical Name	Comments	Common Name (vernacular)
<i>Abutilon hulseanum</i>	softly hairy, peach-tinted blooms open in afternoon, haven for insects	Jann's Mallow PDST 303
<i>Adelia vaseyi</i> (Euphorbia)	frequent only along the Arroyo Colorado; upright growth; MX Bluewing hostplant	Vasey's Adelia PDST 207
<i>Amyris madrensis</i>	common in Arroyo Colorado brush; infrequent elsewhere; excellent for landscaping	Mountain Torchwood PDST 375
<i>Ayenia limitaris</i> (Sterculiaceae)	resembles a Mallow; exceedingly rare; unique bloom, hairy seed capsule	Rio Grande Ayenia PDST 403-4
<i>Capraria mexicana</i> (Scrophulariaceae)	grows easily, very large colony discovered across the street from Ramsey Park in Harlingen; rescued.	Mexican Capraria PDST 385
<i>Cephalanthus salicifolius</i> (Rubiaceae)	Unique to banks of Rio Grande; disturbance has limited natural occurrence.	Mexican Buttonbush PDST 368-9
<i>Chiococca alba</i>	Common at Sabal Palm Grove, Brownsville. Fruit eaten by birds. Aromatic blooms.	David's Milkberry PDST 369
<i>Croton ciliatoglandulifer</i>	Glands on long hairlike cilia; used medicinally as an irritant. Host to Tropical Leafwing.	Mexican Croton PDST 215
<i>Croton cortesianus</i>	Male/female separate plants. Host for Leafwings. Excellent year-round nectar.	Cortez Croton, Palillo PDST 215
<i>Croton humilis</i>	Host to Tropical Leafwing. Excellent year-round nectar. Orange leaves under stress.	Dove Croton, Low Croton. PDST 217
<i>Croton incanus</i>	"Woody, up to 6' tall. Leaves are nicely aromatic, as are many Croton species.	Torrey's Croton PDST 217
<i>Echinocereus berlandieri</i>	Dark green stems may form massive colonies. Brilliant blooms in late March-April.	Dark-Throat Ladyfinger cacti. PDST 163-5
<i>Esenbeckia runyonii</i> (Rutaceae)	Most rare tree in this area. Excellent in landscaping. Requires good drainage.	Runyon's Esenbeckia PDST 376
<i>Gochnatia hypoleuca</i>	Excellent year-round butterfly nectar. White leaf undersides. From high caliche hills.	Chomonque PDST 101
<i>Helietta parvifolia</i> (Rutaceae)	Foliage has citrus aroma. Beautiful in landscaping, but rarely available. Caliche hills.	Barreta 376
<i>Malvastrum americanum</i>	Common along hard-packed trails; yellow blooms year-round, open around sundown.	Malva loca, Cheese-weed. PDST 312
<i>Phaulothamnus spinescens</i>	Small translucent fruit, Soft thorns. Blackish stems. Succulent leaves eaten by deer.	Snake Eyes PDST 55
<i>Sabal mexicana</i>	Once prolific along Rio Grande; historic harvest as pilings. Thornless recurved petiole.	Sabal Palm PDST 27
<i>Taxodium distichum</i> var. <i>mexicanum</i>	Loses leaves <u>only</u> during drought. Once prevalent at rocky spots in the Rio Grande.	Moctezuma Cypress, Sabino. PDST 15
<i>Xylosma flexuosa</i>	Typical habitat is along water sources. Small tasty red-black fruits after sufficient rain.	Brush Holly PDST 274



Christina Mild

RIO DELTA WILD

FLORA FACTS

Scientific Name: *Xylosma flexuosa*

Common Names: Brush Holly, Coronillo

Family: Flacourtiaceae

PDST p 274

After-Christmas Holly Berries

Winter berries for birds are sometimes scarce around South Texas. If we've had recent drizzle, the birds may be in better luck.

Planting fruit-bearing native trees and shrubs would be in-keeping with a season of giving. Unlike the holiday traditions of overspending and overeating, planting brings harmony with the earth! Berries may bring new and different birds into your yard. Not all birds like a daily diet of feeder "birdseed."

Of special value are the plants which fruit when most are barren. During the winter of 1998, at the Valley Nature Center's Nature Park in Weslaco, January and February found most fruiting plants barren. No brasil or granjeno for birds to eat. Few pigeonberries or chilipequin. The anacua "sugar" berries tasted like soap. But Brush Holly was laden with clusters of tiny fruit. This little-noticed plant was loaded, in mid-winter, after many months of drought.

Xylosma flexuosa is the scientific name for Brush Holly. Locally, it's known as Coronillo.

The Native Plant Project has included Coronillo in "Native Shrubs of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas." Photographs and information about it are found on our website: [www.nativeplantproject.org]

Coronillo's leaves are dark green and lustrous, like traditional Christmas "holly," but they aren't deeply notched or rigidly pointed. Like your mental image of holly, Coronillo has red berries. They ripen from yellow through red to purple-black. They're tasty. Those which grow in full sun are very tart. Grown in shade, they're sweeter. I've survived eating many of them on every available occasion. The only noticeable effects have been happiness and a purple tongue.

The plant is known to flower at intervals throughout the year. In my yard, Brush Holly was covered at this writing with tiny, white, compact flower-buds. All of them may be male, or perhaps they're all female flowers. The flowers of Brush Holly are of one sex or another, but both kinds of flowers may be on the same plant. And sometimes, Mike Heep tells me, the female flowers bear fruit without the help of pollen from a male. It's a good idea to plant several of them, anyway, to provide your Coronillo with a sexual partner.

Heep says that Brush Holly prefers low-lying wet places, like resaca banks. At one time, he says, the land around Stuart Place Road and Lewis Lane west of Harlingen was probably an old swamp. Plants which remain in vegetated spots in that vicinity are typical of a low-lying area: taller-than-usual Ebony, Sugar Hackberry, Turk's Cap, Marsillea (which looks like four-leaf clover) and Brush Holly. He



says that you will find Brush Holly below trees, along fence-rows, around that area. Other places where Mike has found wild Coronillo are brushy resaca banks in Brownsville.

This plant requires only low amounts of water and is drought-tolerant. It isn't a typical component of the Arroyo Brush, a higher and drier sort of habitat.

Typically, Coronillo is an understory plant (grows in the filtered shade of taller plants like trees) which often grows at the edge of wooded areas. It will grow in filtered shade or full sun.

The maximum height is twenty feet. Usual height is five to ten feet. The growth form is usually that of a lanky, sprawling shrub.

To form a hedge, Heep recommends diligent pruning and removal of growing tips. With early, diligent pruning, Brush Holly can be trained to form an attractive, compact hedge.

At the Valley Nature Center, no such attempts at control were undertaken. Brush Holly sprawled beneath and behind a cluster of Sabal Palms, usually noticed only by the birds. Some branches are quite thorny, others are less so. The thorns on this plant are not especially vicious, though they may provide protection for a nesting or feasting bird.

Dr. Hoverson of La Feria had a large Brush Holly which was diligently guarded by a mockingbird.

Technical assistance provided by Mike Heep, <heep0311@yahoo.com> and <heepsnursery@gmail.com>. Mrs. Mild holds an M.S. in Biological Science.

Heep and Mild are active participants on the Facebook page: "Native Plants of the Rio Grande Valley". See also: Plants of Deep South Texas by Alfred Richardson and Ken King, 2011, page 274.

C. Mild photos below: Note the variability in leaf margins and color ranging from young to mature.



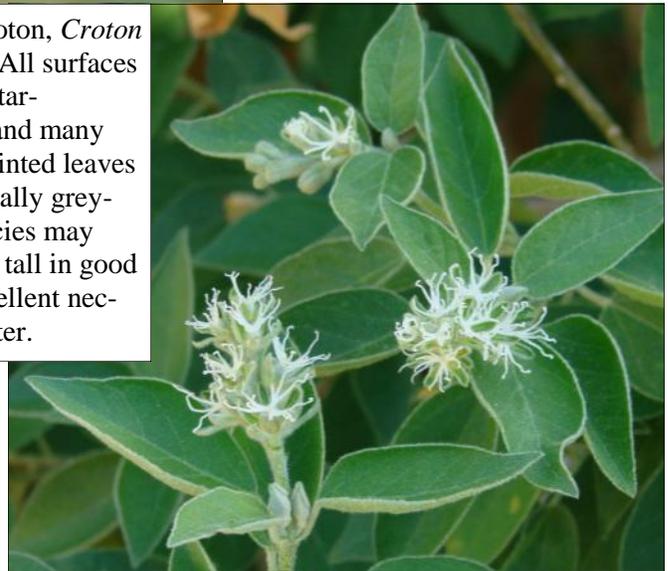
**Croton Species Commonly
Used In Local Landscaping**

See PDST 213-220 for
additional Croton species and
information about them.



Mexican Croton, *Croton ciliatoglandulifer*. (left)
Note the glandular cilia emerging from leaf edges and
from each node. Elongated bloom stalks are also com-
mon. Photo by Dr. Alfred Richardson.

Low (Dove) Croton, *Croton humilis*. (right) All surfaces
are covered in star-
clustered hairs and many
glands. Note pointed leaves
which are generally grey-
green. This species may
grow to be very tall in good
conditions. Excellent nec-
tar, even in winter.



Cortez' Croton, *Croton corte-
sianus*. Leaves are covered in
glands and star-clustered hairs.
Despite that, leaves appear
glossy, sometimes very dark
green. Elongated leaves may be
narrow, ending in pointed tips.
Easily transplanted.



Torrey's Croton, *Croton incanus*. May grow tall
and woody. Note elongated leaves with blunt tips
and light green in color.



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>

These vendors may also sell exotics:

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

**M&G Double D Native Plants &
Seeds of South Texas, (Gail Dantzker)**

956-342-5979; <gdld@att.net>
7500 N 21st St; McAllen, TX 78504
[mandgdoubled.com]
Grown at The Woods, Willacy Cty., TX.

Landscapers using Natives:

Landscaping, Etc. Inc.

Noel Villarreal

125 N. Tower Rd, Edinburg
956-874-4267, 956-316-2599

RGV 30th Annual Birding Festival

Harlingen at the Convention Center

November 8th to 12th. (Weds.-Sun.)

This is NPP's largest fundraiser for the year,
and a great opportunity to share knowledge
about our native plants.

Volunteers are needed to set up and man our booth, collect
payment and assist customers.

Exhibit Hall hours have been increased
for this year. Sat. 10am-6pm
Sun. 10am-4pm

**Contact Jann Miller to assist with any event
as an NPP volunteer: <flordevalle@yahoo.com>**

Encourage neighbors, friends and relatives to visit
the Exhibit Hall (no entry fee) and our booth.

\$35 registration fee for Saturday-Sunday
provides entry to many extras
happening before and during the festival.

See: [<https://www.rgvbf.org>]



NPP Board & General Meetings are held at Valley Nature Center

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

Brd Mtgs 6:30pm — Speaker 7:30pm

Upcoming meetings: Nov 28, 2023
Jan 23, Feb 27, Mar 26, Apr 23, May 28, 2024

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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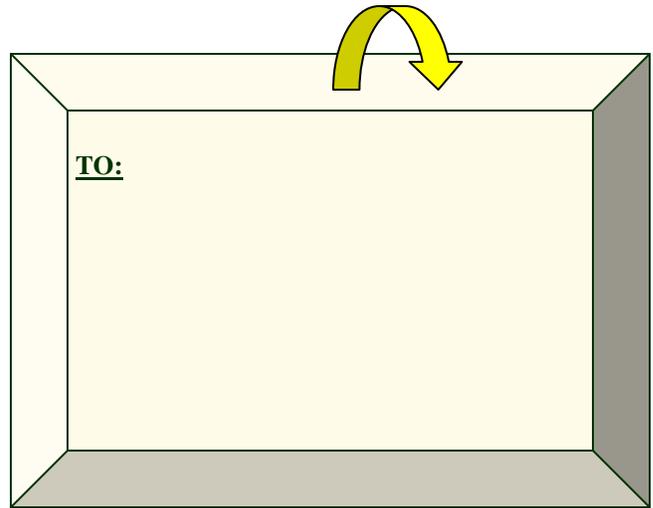
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Native Plant Project, POB 2742, San Juan, TX 78589-7742*



Croton humilis. C. Mild photo.



NPP meeting/speaker:

Native Plant Project October Topic:

“Rio Grande Valley Pollinator Project ”
presented by — Susan Upton

Tues., October 24th, at 7:30pm

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

We hope to see you there!

Feel free to bring a native plant for I.D.
Native Plants are available for a donation.
Great opportunity to love another native plant!



NPP Volunteers Needed: RGV 30th Birding Festival in Harlingen. Nov. 8-12. (See p 7.)

Plant Species in this issue: *Abutilon hulseanum, Adelia vaseyi, Amyris madrensis, Azenia limitaris, Capraria mexicana, Cephalanthus salicifolius, Chiococca alba, Croton ciliatoglandulifer, Croton cortesianus, Croton humilis, Croton incanus, Echinocereus berlandieri, Esenbeckia runyonii, Gochnatia hypoleuca, Helieta parvifolia, Malvastrum americanum, Phaulothamnus spinescens, Sabal mexicana, Taxodium distichum var.mexicanum, Xylosma flexuosa.*