



The Sabal

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Native Plants in the Container Garden

by Sue Griffin

Native plants are primarily used in habitat revegetation, or landscaping a home owner's backyard into a Wildscape. Gardeners are discovering that many of our Rio Grande Valley native plants lend themselves well to container gardening. Container gardening offers immediate gratification by bringing color, and variety to an area. In addition, you can experiment with new plants or combinations of plants and, if the results are less than expected, starting over requires minimal effort. Where containers really excel is in control. The gardeners can choose just the right soil, the right exposure and the right cultural conditions. This is particularly true when you want to have a native plant that will not thrive in the soil type found in your garden.

Why would you want to use native plants in a container garden? Just like their exotic counterpart(s), these plants can be used to soften

the edges of corners, bring color to a patio or porch, or add a focal point to a garden. Small spaces and containers simply go together. Container gardens have long been used by apartment dwellers as a way to substitute for the lack of a yard. By substituting native plants, these patio or balcony gardens can become more wildlife friendly. Native plants are often host or nectar plants for butterflies or food sources for birds.

Just about anything that will hold soil may be used as a planter. Ideally, the pot should have a diameter equal to 1/3 to 1/2 the height of the plant. Anything you use though should have holes drilled in the bottom to allow the surplus water to drain away from the soil. The biggest cause of death to container-grown native plants is overwatering and consequent drowning. Avoid containers with narrow openings because the root system will outgrow the opening and prevent easy repotting. Use containers between 15 and 120 quarts capacity. Small pots restrict the root area and dry out very quickly. The size

and number of plants to be grown will determine the size of the container used.

Natural materials also make great containers. A rock with a depression can accommodate several Pincushion cacti, or a hollow log makes the perfect container for a Woolly Stemodia.

Plants For Hanging Baskets	
Mexican Evening Primrose	<i>Oenothera speciosa</i>
Blanket Flower	<i>Gaillardia aristata</i>
False Honeysuckle (lavender flowers)	<i>Siphonoglossa greggii</i>
False Honeysuckle (white flowers)	<i>Siphonoglossa pilosella</i>
Blanket Flower	<i>Gaillardia aristata</i>
Wine Cup	<i>Callirhoe involucrata</i>
Native Wedelia	<i>Wedelia hispida</i>
Rock Daisy	<i>Perityle microglossa</i>
Woolly Stemodia	<i>Stemodia tomentosa</i>
Heliotrope	<i>Heliotropium angiospermum</i>

Don't forget hanging baskets. Several of the low growing shrubs or ground covers make wonderful hanging baskets. Be sure to line hanging baskets with sphagnum moss for water retention and keep baskets away from afternoon sun.

A single shrub or small tree when planted in a large pot can add shade to a small patio or deck. Training these shrubs into the desired shape requires a little more pruning than if they are grown in the landscape, but it is well worth the effort.

Plants with unusual structure	
Chapotillo or Texas Torchwood	<i>Amyris texana</i>
Adelia	<i>Adelia vaseyi</i>

The structural elements of some plants can stand alone. Texas Torchwood and Adelia are two such plants. Each is the host plant for desirable butterflies and add an architectural element to the space they inhabit.

Flowering Plants To Use In Medium To Large Pots	
Heart-leaf Hibiscus	<i>Hibiscus martianus (cardiophyllus)</i>
Texas Lantana	<i>Lantana horrida</i>
Brushy Lippia	<i>Lippia alba</i>
Sweet Stem	<i>Aloysia macrostachya</i>
Skeleton-leaf Daisy	<i>Vaguiera stenoloba</i>
Shrubby Blue Sage	<i>Salvia ballotaiiflora</i>
Mexican Trixis	<i>Trixis inula</i>
Yellow Sophora	<i>Sophora tomentosa</i>

Some flowering native species stand alone on the quality of their unique blooming characteristics. The only regular pruning required for this group is to remove spent flowers and occasionally reshape the plant. To ensure an abundance of flowers, it is best to prune the young plants into multi-trunk specimens as soon as you get the plant. The more stems you have on a plant, the more blooms you will have. If you are starting the plants from seed or cuttings, begin with 3 plants per pot—planted within a few inches of each other.

Plants That Can Be Used In Large Containers As Patio Trees	
Barbados Cherry or Manzanita	<i>Malpighia glabra</i>
Texas Baby's Bonnets	<i>Coursetia axillaris</i>
Cortez Croton	<i>Croton cortesianus</i>
Desert Yaupon	<i>Schaefferia cuneifolia</i>
Sierra Madre Torchwood	<i>Amyris madrensis</i>

To obtain the best results when planting in larger pots, start with a substantially sized plant or group several one-gallon plants in the same pot.

Small Plants For Color	
Rough Purslane	<i>Portulaca pilosa</i>
Blanket Flower	<i>Gaillardia aristata</i>
Wine Cup	<i>Callirhoe involucrata</i>
Native Wedelia	<i>Wedelia hispida</i>
Rock Daisy	<i>Perityle macroglossa</i>
Wooly Stemodia	<i>Stemodia tomentosa</i>
Snake Herb	<i>Dyaschoriste crenulata</i>
Heliotrope (Turnsole)	<i>Heliotropium angiospermum</i>
Seaside Heliotrope	<i>Heliotropium curassavicum</i>
Velvet Lantana	<i>Lantana velutina</i>
Pigeonberry	<i>Rivina humilis</i>
Chilipiquin	<i>Capsicum annum</i>

The plants in the table Small Plants for Color can be used in a variety of container sizes and types. The draping or spreading characteristic of these plants make them excellent filler under patio trees, or as a single showy specimen. Each has flowers or berries that add color to the container garden. Some are considered annuals, but many of them bloom most of the year. Grouping several of these containers or combining several of these plants together can provide a variety of blooms and fruit throughout the year.

Combinations that are well suited together are Rock Daisy, Wooly Stemodia and Heliotrope. Other combinations that are pleasing and whose needs are similar are Velvet Lantana and Pigeonberry or Chilipiquin and Native Wedelia.

Some of the plants listed in the table Small Plants for Color are also suitable for hanging baskets. The same draping quality that made them good as filler plants make them ideal as hanging baskets. In addition to the combinations listed above, single plantings of False Honeysuckle, with a mixture of both white and lavender flowers, is quite impressive and a hanging basket of Gaillardia is a show stopper in any container garden.

Vines for the Container Garden	
Blue Passion Vine	<i>Passiflora foetida</i>
Slender Lobed Passion Vine	<i>Passiflora tenuiloba</i>
Thin Stemmed Passion Vine, or Yellow Passion Vine	<i>Passiflora filipes</i>
Yellow Passion Vine	<i>Passiflora suberosa</i>
Morning Glory	<i>Ipomoea amnicola</i>
Railroad Vine	<i>Ipomoea pescaprea</i>
Snapdragon Vine	<i>Maurandia antirrhiniflora</i>
Angel Trumpets	<i>Acleisanthes obtusa</i>

Native vines are a natural for container gardens. The only special requirement for growing a showy vine is something to twine around. This can be a simple trellis, an obelisk, or a few branches from that recently pruned tree. If you take the time to train the vines to their supports, you will be rewarded with a pleasing structural addition to your garden.

This is by no means a complete list of Rio Grande Valley native plants that are suitable for container gardening. Hopefully, it has awakened your interest in expanding your use of native plants. Container gardening is a little more challenging than growing plants in the ground, but the rewards are worth it.

Sue Griffin is a Board member of the NPP, President of the Arroyo Colorado Audubon Society, and Owner of Mother Nature's Creations: specializing in native plant landscaping, container gardens, and water features. See page six for contact information.



The Snapdragon vine above, and the close-up below, showing the beautiful bluish flower, is located on a patio where it is protected from wind and afternoon sun. The photo below shows the same plant in early fall when it is at its fullest.



David's milkberry wraps its sprawling stems around this wooden planter beside the author's front door.





Woolly Stemodia, Rock Daisy, and Heliotrope above combine to make the above hanging basket stunning.



This grouping of Barbados Cherry, center back in large pot and to the back left; Velvet Lantana, center front, and Pigeonberry, right, are grouped to complement each other and bring color to this patio corner.



Wedelia is an excellent choice to fill in under a Barbados Cherry that is being trained as a small tree in this large pot. Snake Herb that is just starting to drape over the edge of the pot will help to soften the pot's edge. This type of combination is known as a Thriller, Filler, Spiller planting.



The cobalt blue of this ceramic pot and the faint, white blooms and green foliage of both Curled leaf and Seaside Heliotrope, complement the lavender blooms and grey-green foliage of Snake Herb.

Nature Happenings Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas

For a comprehensive calendar of Nature Happenings go to RGV Nature Coalition at www.rgvnaturecoalition.org Scroll down to and click on Nature Events Calendar on right side

Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary— Wonders of Nature. Call (956) 541-8034. Or go to www.tx.audubon.org/centers/sabal

Edinburg Scenic Wetlands and World Birding Center — Bird Walks and Nature tours. Native Plant Landscaping. 714 Raul Longoria Rd., Edinburg, TX (956) 381-9922.

Quinta Mazatlan - McAllen Wing of the World Birding Center— 600 Sunset Ave., McAllen, TX. Call Colleen Hook (956) 688-3370 for scheduled events

Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park WBC offers butterfly walks, bird walks, nature tours. Call 956-584-9156 for details and times.

Santa Ana NWR near Alamo offers **Nature Tram rides** with Interpreters at 9:30 a.m., 12 noon and 2:00 p.m. every day (956) 784-7500 or **Valley Nature Center** (956) 969-2475

Estero Llano Grande State Park WBC - 3301 International Blvd. (FM 1015) in Weslaco, TX Call (956) 565-3919 for scheduled events

Valley Proud Environmental Council from bagging grass clippings to Captain Crab puppet shows, call Laura Maxwell 956-412-8004, vpec@sbcglobal.net or visit www.valleyproud.org

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The Sabal is the Newsletter of the Native Plant Project and conveys information on the native habitat, 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 @ 956-968-3454, or g-el1951@sbcglobal.net**

See *The Sabal* and our 5 handbooks on our 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.

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Comments/ suggestions/ speaker recommendations should be sent to: Native Plant Project, P.O. Box 2742, San Juan, TX 78589 or contact G. Lester (956)-968-3454; g-el1951@sbcglobal.net

Native Plant Project Meetings – April 22, 2008. **Board meeting** at 6:30 p.m.; **General meeting** at 7:30 p.m. Christina Mild will be walking us through “Mr. Yuck’s Garden”. Toxic seeds, toxic fruit, toxic or irritating leaves - South Texas has them all. Christina will help us identify the native plants that could cause us harm.

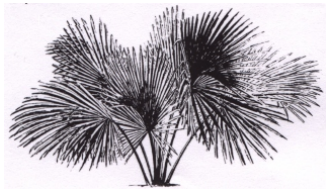
Board and General Meetings 2008:

January 22	March 25	May 27	October 28
February 26	April 22	September 23	November 25

SUMMARY OF THE MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – March 25, 2008

The Board approved a new budget for 2008, which includes the expenditure of \$500 for a new display screen. Sill announced the initiation of the Texas Native Plant Conservation Alliance. The board decided that the NPP will attend a booth at the Home and Garden Show in McAllen in spring 2009.

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