

Roosevelt weed

By Ricky Linex

Wildlife Biologist, Natural Resources Conservation Service

This month's native plant is one of at least four species of *Baccharis* found across Texas. This species, *Baccharis neglecta*, goes by the common names of Roosevelt weed, Poverty weed, New Deal weed and False willow. Though native to Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, this plant was first widely recognized during the Dust Bowl days of the 1930's. This plant readily appears in neglected, disturbed or out of production land which was widespread during the drought of the 1930's. President Franklin D. Roosevelt inherited the Dust Bowl and the Depression when he assumed office in 1933. He initiated government programs to get people back to work among several of his "New Deal" programs. Since this plant was also becoming very noticeable about the same time, it became known as Roosevelt weed and New Deal weed. Perhaps not what a Presidents inner circle would want as popular advertising, but the names stuck.

Roosevelt weed is a shrub with many ascending basal branches that grows from 3 to 9 feet in height with widths about half the height. The branches are brownish-gray, smooth with grooves down the length of the branches giving them an angled appearance. The alternate leaves attach directly to the branches. These leaves are very narrow while averaging 1 to 3 inches in length. The leaf margins are entire or with the lower part widely toothed. There is one main rib visible and leaves are gland dotted. Male and female plants are separate with only female plants producing fruits. Flower heads bloom silvery-white on the ends of branches during the fall and early winter. Fruits are minute seeds distributed by the wind. The leaves can be considered partly evergreen having the ability to survive several hard freezes before going dormant although in South Texas they may remain green well into winter.

Roosevelt weed provides poor browse value for livestock and deer. Plants may be browsed upon when new growth is present, but it's not considered a palatable browse. The new growth that followed the extremely wet September and October of 2018 saw the tips of new growth being grazed upon along the North Wichita River in Knox County the first week of December. Cattle and white-tailed deer were present in the pasture and were nipping the tips of all branches within reach. The minute seeds are of little value to game and songbirds. The flowers are visited by many pollinators during the fall. Perhaps the greatest value of Roosevelt weed is when it is found growing in riparian areas where the fibrous roots help to provide erosion control and early successional growth on sand and gravel bars and exposed banks following high flow events. When found in riparian areas it should be allowed to grow and do a job until better riparian plants can become established. This species of *Baccharis* is widely distributed in Texas apart from the Piney Woods and the High Plains.

When found growing in upland areas, such as native rangeland or introduced pastures or open woods it is considered undesirable and should be removed by chemical or mechanical means. Removing it from upland areas is a viable option. It can appear from wind-blown seed and rapidly spread in uplands reducing grass and forb production. Roosevelt weed often spreads from roadsides and other disturbed areas into uplands. It can grow on various soils but does best on sandier soils. Many people mistake the species of *Baccharis* for salt cedar until they know what salt cedar really looks like. Though it spreads much like the introduced and invasive salt cedar, this native shrub has value in certain situations. When you first notice it on uplands of your property or along the boundary of your property, begin control methods to slow the spread upon the uplands.

Photo captions:

1 The numerous branches of Roosevelt weed are one identifiable trait used to recognize this native shrub.



2 By November the flowering heads begin to show their silvery-white appearance.



3 This small creek shows the flowering heads of Roosevelt weed in the early fall.



4 By Thanksgiving the plants are totally covered with soon to be windblown seeds.



5 The numerous small hair-like filaments enable the seeds to be carried by the wind or flowing water and aids in the rapid spread of this shrub.



6 Roosevelt weed growing on the banks of the North Wichita River showing browsing in early December 2018.



7 Close-up of the browsed stems of Roosevelt weed showing that all plants may have value even though we don't always understand their value.



8 Differences between Roosevelt weed, on bottom of photo, and salt cedar are readily apparent though the growth form of the branches is similar for both shrubs leading to confusion about identity.

