



# The Sabal

September 2023  
Volume 39, number 6

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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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articles and/or photos  
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NPP meeting topic/speaker: **Tues., September 26th, at 7:30pm**

“Sustainability”*presented by* — Janet Schofield

Sustainability is the issue of the current century. As human beings we must find a way to relate to our environment in more sustainable ways. Janet Schofield will describe efforts we have made to develop Hugel cultures here in the Rio Grande Valley. She will explain what a Forest Garden is and how to use our native plants to develop one.

Janet Schofield is a retired math teacher who quickly became a full time gardener upon retirement. She is a Master Gardener in both Cameron and Hidalgo counties. She brings specialist training in composting and plant propagation, and her passion is composting, particularly Hugel Culture.

The meeting is at:

**Valley Nature Center,**  
301 S Border, (Gibson Park),  
Weslaco.  
956-969-2475.

Potato Tree blooms.  
*Solanum erianthum*, PDST 401.  
Note the wooly covering on the stems and sepals, as well as the busy ants.  
Photo by Robert Gaitan.



**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](http://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](mailto:bwessling@rgv.rr.com)>

Christina Mild — RIO DELTA WILD

### Flora Facts

Scientific name: *Eysenhardtia texana*

Common name: Texas Kidneywood, Rock Brush,

Family: Fabaceae (Leguminosae: Papilionoideae)

See also: Plants of Deep South Texas by Alfred Richardson and Ken King, 2011, page 262.

### Wet Kidneywood Glows Fluorescent

Driving west of La Joya, north of Edinburg, and in Laguna Atascosa NWR, you may see brilliant butterflies on conical bloomspikes of Kidneywood. It is a preferred nectar plant during our fall butterfly season.

Kidneywood is a host plant for the Southern Dogface butterfly. Berry Nall has an excellent series of photos of the life-cycle of this gorgeous butterfly, *Zerene cesonia*. [<https://leps.thenalls.net/>]

[Photos of the adult and caterpillar are from Nall's website.](#)

Betty Perez, whose family ranch (Rancho San Francisco) is a popular fieldtrip destination, enjoys the fragrance of the blossoms. The foliage smells like a tangerine, though some descriptions of the fragrance allude to creosote. The fragrance of leaves can depend on hydration: drought-stricken leaves may be unpleasantly smelly. Such is protective for plants lacking thorns, like the delicate pinnately-compound-leaved kidneywood.

Before Weslaco's Valley Nature Center moved into a modern building, they were housed in an old decrepit structure. A large kidneywood was visible from the front window. It was a dependable place to find small birds like the tufted titmouse, with pointy black headdress and endearingly-large black eyes. Frequent "tit" calls assure their presence. The titmouse isn't usually alone. Small warblers, many nectarers and pollinators visit kidneywood on a regular basis. After all, banquet choices include a variety of insects, nectar or small seedpods, according to seasonal availability.

You wouldn't think of kidneywood as being a "delta" plant. It's found in the calcareous soils one thinks of as edging the river's wide delta. It's also found at Laguna Atascosa NWR. Mike Heep explains that lots of caliche was brought to that area when it was a gunnery range, and a number of plants probably came along with those truckloads of caliche.

The Native Plant Project (NPP) includes Texas Kidneywood in "Native Shrubs of the LRGV, TX. Landscape Uses and Identification." They recommend good drainage, sandy, caliche or gravelly soils. NPP's Joe Ideker (God rest his soul) planted Kidneywood at the old Edinburg post office, near Hidalgo County Historical Museum. Mike Heep tells me the post office Kidneywoods flourished there, in full sunlight and with plenty of space to reach, perhaps, a height of fifteen feet and the vigor of a full-based, multi-trunked shrub. (Many of Joe's plantings have been destroyed for various reasons over the years.)

While Texas Kidneywood in shady urban settings may require some pruning to check its airy growth, those in the wild are compact. Extremely drought-tolerant, it is a vital source of high-nitrogen nutrition for deer (and livestock), who provide frequent and vigorous pruning. Mike Heep assures me that kidneywood doesn't freeze.

The medical and practical uses of Texas Kidneywood are intriguing. Dr. Robert Vines (Trees, Shrubs and Wood Vines of the Southwest, 1960) explains that closely-related species were used in the treatment of kidney disorders. He notes use of the wood in making dyes and its fluorescence in water.

Of even more interest in that regard is closely-related *Eysenhardtia polystachya*, referred to simply as "Kidneywood," distinguishable by larger leaves. It is a plant of arid slopes and dry ridges, 3500-5000 ft., found in Arizona, New Mexico, Sonora, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas and Oaxaca. An infusion of the heartwood in water becomes golden-yellow, deepening to



*continued on page 3*





*continued from page 2.*

orange. Held in a glass vial against a black background, it exhibits a beautiful peacock-blue fluorescence. The wood was well-known in Europe in the 17th century. In Mexico, drinking troughs made from the wood are used for watering fowl or pieces of the wood are placed into their drinking water to ward off disease.

That should sell: a wet-fluorescent, anti-infective, wooden drinking mug!! I would try it!

Technical assistance provided by Mike Heep.  
Heeps Native Nursery is on Facebook.

Jose Palmos, Heep, Mild are active participants on the Facebook page: "Native Plants of the Rio Grande Valley".

*Photos by Jose Palmos from his yard in Harlingen, TX.*



### **Congratulations to Ken King!**

Our illustrious board member and former NPP President has been selected to receive the 2023 Shirley Lusk Memorial Award from the Native Plant Society of Texas.

Ken was selected "for collecting hundreds of specimens primarily in South TX, documenting new species, populations in work with Dr. Richardson and his books. Ken has documented new populations of plants rare to south TX, or rare in TX, further increasing our knowledge of Texas flora. Collections are at University of Texas at Austin, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Harvard, and Texas A & M. The award honors a community scientist for collecting and preserving Texas native plants for public education by providing outstanding contributions of herbarium vouchers.

FLORA FACTS

Scientific Name: *Diospyros texana*

Common Names: Chapote, Texas Persimmon

Family: Ebenaceae. PDST 205

**Chapote Brings Wildlife Diversity**

Chapote is one of my all-time favorite native trees. You see, I have eaten the Chapote's fruit.

*Diospyros* means "fruit of the gods." Dark blue-black and sweet it is. As good as chocolate, it doesn't melt on a hot day. I don't often find Chapote fruit, as they are relished by chachalaca, quail, turkey, songbirds, deer, javelina, feral hogs, coyote, raccoons, opossums and skunks, all of whom spend more time foraging in the woods than I do.

Chapote's leaves are grazed occasionally by livestock. The Gray Hairstreak, a small butterfly, uses Chapote as a host plant. You may find their caterpillars munching on Chapote leaves. Ken King reports that it is a desired species for flannel moth caterpillars (the dreaded Asps.) He has had at least 17 at once on his Chapote.

Chapote is deciduous to evergreen, depending on growing conditions. Mature leaves will sometimes fall before new spring leaves are apparent. Leaf density is low to low-moderate. Chapote leaves are leathery dark green above, lighter below. They roll under at the edge, a good way to identify the tree when you're unsure. Botanists describe such leaves as having revolute margins.

Insects collect pollen and sip nectar from the sweet-smelling blooms. These appear in early to mid spring. On close inspection they resemble small bells. Plants will be male or female: only females will bear fruit, thus it is a good idea to plant several specimens.

*Diospyros texana* (di-OS-pi-ros tex-ANN-uh) has no thorns, prickles, or other armament.

"Texas Persimmon grows in a grove, has many basal stems and is rhizomatous. It is an evergreen shrub with a thick canopy reaching six to ten feet in height. It grows in sandy, shallow, and rocky limestone soils of the South Texas Plains and the Edwards Plateau." [Uvalde.-tamu.-edu/-herbarium]

Poorly-drained areas of heavy clay soil make poor planting sites. In ideal conditions, the tree can attain a height of 40 feet. Smaller stature is more common in this area.

Websites from Oregon to California provide information for homeowners considering this tree.



Chapote is native to portions of Texas and Mexico. In Texas it occurs in the Rio Grande Plains, Edwards Plateau, and the southeastern corner of the Trans-Pecos region. In Mexico it is found in the northern portions of Nuevo Leon, Coahuila, Tamaulipas and possibly in the extreme northeastern corner of Chihuahua.

It is found abundantly in the Edwards Plateau and does well near the coast on soils with lime composition from marine shells. It's drought-tolerant, requiring only 12 inches of rainfall per year.

Older specimens have magnificent trunks. Thin bark peels away in patches, leaving the surface a beautiful, smooth silvery-grey.

Chapote can be grown from fresh seed. Several local nurseries sell the trees.



*continued on page 5*



continued from page 4

A narrow crown makes Texas Persimmon perfect for patio and pool plantings or as an accent for small areas. Root damage potential is low, an excellent characteristic for a landscape plant. Landscape applications include: specimen, container, street tree, buffer strip and bonsai.

In areas where Chapote is common, the wood has found many uses. It is ideal for salt-shakers, as it readily absorbs moisture. The heavy wood makes superb tool handles and wood engraving blocks. "The heartwood, found only in very large trunks, is black ... while the sapwood is clear yellow." (National Wildflower Research Center, Austin.)

The need to diversify urban landscapes is becoming more apparent throughout North America. Our efforts to do so now will certainly impact future generations. I think our grandchildren will enjoy Chapote's fruit and watch the birds which come to feast. Maybe they will learn to plant the seed and teach their children to eat the fruit.

Forest diversity has all but disappeared on the Rio Grande Delta, and we are not alone in the United States in this ecological change. Flying in a small plane from Weslaco to Illinois in summer 1999, I was horrified to see that most of the forests below me grew in straight rows! Planted by man to replace mixed forests, these are mono-cultures of the most economically-harvested species.

Will we lose the richness of our forests? That answer lies in how we vote, what we buy, in what we waste and what we teach.

Technical assistance provided by Mike Heep. Heep's Nursery is on Facebook.

Mrs. Mild holds an M.S. in Biological Science, specializing in Cell Biology and Quantitative Chemistry.

Heep and Mild are active participants on the Facebook page: "Native Plants of the Rio Grande Valley"



**A closer view of common milkweed.**

Photos by Roberto Gaitan.

Above: Zizotes in bloom, *Asclepias oenotheroides*, PDST 75.

Left: Detail from Climbing Milkweed Vine, *Funastrum cynanchoides*, PDST 79.

Right: Mature seeds from Zizotes. Note tiny droplets of dew adhering to the fibrous fluff.

In each photo, one sees tiny hairs on many surfaces; these capture dew and protect the plant in many ways.





**Quiz Yourself:**

From Bottom Left, clockwise:

\*Seed Capsule on Jann’s Mallow, *Abutilon hulseanum*, PDST 303.

Bloom and green fruit on Chile pequin, *Capsicum annum*, PDST 391.



Mature and immature fruit on Googly-Eye Vine, Bastard Rattoot, *Tournefortia volubilis*, PDST 150.

Bloombuds on Alamo Vine, Wood Rose, *Merremia dissecta*, PDT 198.

\*Much-magnified bloom on Blue Creeping Sage, *Salvia misella*, PDST 288.

\*Note the stalked glands: tiny hairs with sticky tips.



Robert Gaitan Photos

**Native Plant Project “Board Business”** Here are the events the NPP will be involved in this fall:

1) Centennial Event at Bentsen State Park will be held Saturday September 23rd from 4 PM to 8 PM. The NPP has been invited to have a table at La Familia Nature Center inside the park to share information about native plants and to receive donations for any native plants we can provide. Bring your own lawn chairs. We have a volunteer to bring two tables, but if anyone has an extra table to spare, we could probably use it. Roy Rodriguez, the Park Ranger/Lead Interpreter for Bentsen has promised that we can set up our tables outdoors under shade. We need volunteers for this event.

2) Planta Nativa at Quinta Mazatlan will *tentatively* be held on October 26th from 6:30 PM to 9:30 PM. The NPP has been invited to help with the seed giveaway table again this year. John Brush has alerted everyone to a potential change in the date, of which I will keep you informed. Tables and chairs will be provided as well as some seeds to give away. John requests that the NPP donate some seeds to the event if possible, as he has a shorter supply of seeds than he had last year. Also, there will be another contest for native plant yards/gardens. We need volunteers for this event.

3) RGV Birding Festival will be held in Harlingen at the convention center November 8th to 12th. This is our biggest fundraiser for the year, and a great opportunity to share knowledge about our native plants.

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



*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](http://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



Turk's Cap,  
*Malvaviscus drummondii*,  
PDST 313.

Note the many tiny brown ants  
surrounding the sepals of each  
bloom and bud and the typical  
“mallow” bloom.

This is one of the most  
enticing nectar sources for  
hummingbirds.

Photo by Robert Gaitan.

**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:** Sept 26, Oct 24, 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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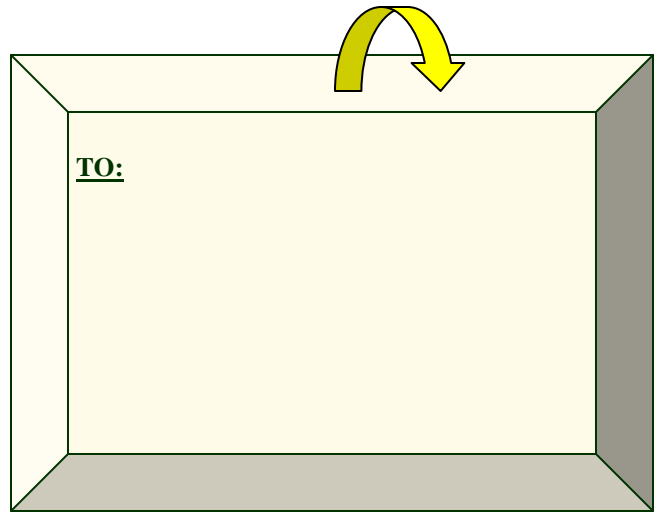
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Native Plant Project, POB 2742, San Juan, TX 78589-7742*



**NPP meeting/speaker:**

The Native Plant Project will present:

**“Sustainability”**

*presented by — Janet Schofield*

**Tues., September 26th, 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!

Above: Mexican Buttonbush, fresh bloom, *Cephalanthus salicifolius*, PDST 369. Robert Gaitan photo.

Other Plant Species in this issue: *Abutilon hulseanum*, *Asclepias oenotheroides*, *Capsicum annum*, *Diospyros texana*, *Eysenhardtia texana*, *Funastrum cynanchoides*, *Malvaviscus drummondii*, *Merremia dissecta*, *Salvia misella*, *Solanum erianthum*, *Tournefortia volubilis*.