



# The Sabal

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## Herbal, Medicinal and Aromatic Gardens

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One thinks of herbal gardens as containing cooking herbs, plants of medicinal value or having leaves with a pleasant aroma. Hardy specimens filling those criteria are LRGV "natives."

Many plants come to my mind as candidates for such a place. I've

written complete articles about most of them in the past. Together, they provide a realm of sensory pleasure.

Soft-leaved shrubs, often related to the family of mints, are typical of herbal gardens. **Desert Oregano**, *Lippia graveolens*, fits this description. Adorned with tiny white blooms, it smells as you'd expect. **Shrubby Blue Sage**, *Salvia ballotaeflora*, sports brilliant blue blossoms with a bit of fertilizer and watering. One imagines roasting poultry with a whiff of these leaves. It's called *Mejorana*: even the aroma leaves a person feeling

“better.” Leaves are used in cooking and for tea. *Aloysia macrostachya*, an airy shrub with spikes of tiny purple flowers, is **Sweet Stem** (*Vara Dulce*) for the fragrance of its foliage. **Scruffy Dalea**, *Dalea scandens*, is barely noticeable on sunny edges of Arroyo Colorado Brush, with clusters of nondescript pinkish blossoms. Scent makes it worth cultivation. It transplants readily, growing easily and rapidly with little care. *Hierba Negra*, *Lippia alba*, likewise has a lovely aroma. Look for this **Sprawling Lippia** along the Arroyo Colorado’s banks in areas of relatively little disturbance. For the herbal garden on resaca’s edge, this is a good choice. It roots easily to spread lanky limbs, adorned with purple blossoms at each node.

Two plants with high vitamin C come to mind. **Chilipequin**, planted everywhere by birds, seasons things with gusto. The range of color, shape and size of fruit on these plants is an attractive addition to any garden. **Barbados Cherry**, *Malpighia glabra*, sports frilly, delicate blossoms when moisture is sufficient. Bright red cherries, exceptionally high in vitamin C, bring resident mockingbirds to chase off pesky grackles. It grows as groundcover, shrub or hedge.

Several plants with specific medicinal properties are great candidates for visual impact in the herbal garden. **Sangre de Drago**, *Jatropha dioica*, spreads to form an unpredictable colony of short, rubbery sticks. Butterflies enjoy the funnelform blooms. These stems contain an astringent which tightens loose teeth. Allthorn Goat Bush, *Castela erecta*, is reminiscent of Oriental artistry, with stark contrast and angled branches. Tea from the bitter, tiny leaves (which lend the name **Amargosa**) wards off amoebic dysentery. Delicate blossoms and shiny red fruit add to the unusual character of this plant. **Toothache Tree** enjoys close proximity to Live Oak. It (*Zanthoxylum hirsutum*) is a strong shrub, well-armed, with prickly-edged shiny leaves and strong thorns. The tingling sensation of a leaf upon one’s tongue is memorably enjoyable and soothes a toothache.

Teas to comfort cough and ease congestion are easily made from leaves of two common landscape plants: Purple-blooming **Cenizo**, *Leucophyllum frutescens* and Anacahuita, *Cordia boissieri*. Buff-bellied hummingbirds assume guard of the often-flowering **Anacahuita**, which also attracts a wide range of butterflies.

Native citrus offer several choices for adding the pleasant aroma of crushed foliage and year-round glossy leaves. **Colima**, *Zanthoxylum fagara*, is likely the most-easily grown, germinating readily from abundant seed. A nasty plant to encounter, Colima creates an effective and attractive barrier. Citrus tea from Colima is a time-honored custom among long-time local residents. **Sierra Madre Torchwood**, *Amyris madrensis*, will grow tall and erect with attractive upright branches. *Amyris texana*, **Texas Torchwood**, survives full sun or even the shade of an ebony tree. Both torchwoods sport clusters of white flowers, followed by edible (if not tasty) fruit, probably loaded with vitamin C. **Barreta**, *Helietta parvifolia*, threatened with extinction in the wild but available from native plant nurserymen, forms a lovely erect

tree, with glossy, lime-green three-lobed leaves. The glossy leaves of native citrus provide a particular lovely contrast in winter.

*Teucrium Canadensis* (**American Germander**) leaves may be employed as antiseptic dressing for wounds. Seasonal, it thrives in cool, damp weather and spreads rampantly in watered gardens.

(See "Trees, Shrubs & Cacti of South Texas," by Everitt & Drawe, 1993, for additional information and photos of each plant included in this article. See also

[[www.nativeplantproject.org](http://www.nativeplantproject.org)].

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Common Names	Genus & Species	Family	Growth Form	Basic Growing Requirements (all are drought tolerant once established)
Vara Dulce, Sweet Stem	<i>Aloysia macrostachya</i>	Verbenaceae	shrub	low-medium water, full-part sun, well draining soils; tall, airy growth allows ample space for groundcover below
Sierra Madre Torchwood	<i>Amyris madrensis</i>	Rutaceae	shrub/ tree	full to partial sun, good drainage, growth is slow until established, upright stems, glossy and evergreen
Lantrisco, Chapotillo, Texas Torchwood	<i>Amyris texana</i>	Rutaceae	shrub	full to partial sun, good drainage, growth is slow until established, tolerates ebony understory
Chile piquin, Bird Pepper	<i>Capsicum annum</i>	Solanaceae	herb	full to partial sun, medium drainage, prolific growth with ample water, easily obtained, reseeded by birds
Amargosa, Allthorn Goat Bush	<i>Castela erecta</i>	Simaroubaceae	shrub	not widely cultivated. Attractive but very thorny; probably slow to establish. Highly attractive shrub, given ample space.
Anacahuita, Mexican Wild Olive	<i>Cordia boissieri</i>	Boraginaceae	tree	full to partial sun, moderate drainage, water in early summer for best growth. Easily obtained from local nurseries.
Scruffy Dalea	<i>Dalea scandens</i>	Leguminosae	shrub	full sun, medium water, not widely cultivated, rapid growth, may spread once established. Nice edging for pathways.
Barreta	<i>Helietta parvifolia</i>	Rutaceae	tree	full sun, low-medium water, not easily obtained, excellent drainage preferred. Rapid growth once established.
Sangre de Drago, Dragon's Blood	<i>Jatropha dioica</i>	Euphorbiaceae	shrub	full sun, winter deciduous, can form a large, compact shrub in best conditions. Does nicely in cultivation.
Cenizo, Barometer bush, purple sage	<i>Leucophyllum frutescens</i>	Scrophulariaceae	shrub	full sun, good drainage, widely-available in a range of foliage/ bloom colors. Provides color contrast.
Hierba negra, Sprawling Lippia	<i>Lippia alba</i>	Verbenaceae	shrub	full sun, withstands flooding, gorgeous blooms during cool weather. Plan for sprawling, spreading growth.
Oregano Cimarron, Mexican Oregano	<i>Lippia graveolens</i>	Verbenaceae	shrub	full sun, well-drained, grows exceedingly well adjacent to pavement, bushy shrub. Provide ample space.
Manzanita, Xochtatl, Barbados Cherry	<i>Malpighia glabra</i>	Malpighiaceae	shrub	full-partial sun, medium drainage, grows as groundcover, hedge or shrub. Extremely adaptable in landscaping.
Mejorana, Shrubby Blue Sage	<i>Salvia ballotaeflora</i>	Lamiaceae	shrub	full-partial sun, good drainage, brittle branches best grown away from traffic
American Germander	<i>Teucrium canadense</i>	Lamiaceae	herb	spreads aggressively, withstands shade, perfect as seasonal plant for low shady, unwatered spots
Colima, Una de Gato,	<i>Zanthoxylum fagara</i>	Rutaceae	shrub	withstands everything, grows aggressively, easily grown via broadcast seeding. Needs aggressive pruning in small spaces.
Hercules' Club, Toothache Tree	<i>Zanthoxylum hirsutum</i>	Rutaceae	shrub	brittle, not readily available. Glossy foliage is very attractive.

Native Plant Rescue: **The Valley Nature Center** will rescue native plants about to be destroyed by construction companies, developers, or no longer wanted by home owners. Call 956-969-2475.

**Exclusively Native plant sources:**

Benito Trevino, Landscaper/Grower, Rio Grande City 956-487-4626

Valley Nature Center – Native Plants, Weslaco 956-969-2475

Mother Nature's Creations, Harlingen 956-428-4897

Heep's Nursery, Harlingen 956-457-6834



**Nature Happenings in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas**

**Texas State Park Tours/ World Birding Center, Mission, Texas**— Lomitas Ranch Tours and other natural area tours 7:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. every Tuesday and Friday from Bentson Rio Grande State Park/World Birding Center in Mission, TX. Outings focus on native plants and their uses. Fees: \$25 per person, reservations required - call 956-519-6448. Or go to [www.worldbirdingcenter.org](http://www.worldbirdingcenter.org)

**Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary**— Native plant presentation and tour by Joseph Krause – every weekday at 10 a.m. Pre-registration required – call 956-541-8034.

**Laguna Atascosa NWR**— Nature BIKE RIDES on Saturdays from 8 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. and Nature WALKS, Sundays from 8 a.m. - 10 a.m. Call for details: 956-748-3607.

**Santa Ana NWR**— Drive your car around the scenic loop drive on Sat. And Sun. Hours: 9:00 a.m. To 3:30 p.m. 956-784-7500.

The Sabal is the Newsletter of the Native Plant Project and conveys information on the native habitats, 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 @ 956-425-4005, or g\_lester48@msn.com. See *The Sabal* and our 4 handbooks on the website:

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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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Native Plant Project Meetings – May 23, 2006. **Board meeting** at 6:30 pm; **General meeting** at 7:30pm featuring: Sue Griffin and Billy Snider, Jr., owners of Mother Nature’s Creations, a native landscape and water feature company, will present the program “Maintenance and Pruning of Native Plants”. Learn when, how, and why to prune your shrubs from their photos and demonstrations.

**Board and General Meeting 2006:**

January 24	May 23
February 28	September 26
March 28	October 24
April 25	November 28

**Board Meeting Only 2006:**

June 27 July 25 August 22

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