

Gardens in Bloom

(week of Nov 22, 2020)

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center currently cannot offer Saturday classes, weekend Rep-Tales and Parrot Talk, or Orchid-ology series, due to COVID-19 protocol, plus health and safety of guests. Fulfilling its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical plant and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week, or enhance your landscape!

WHITE MEXICAN OLEANDER (*Cascabela thevetia*)

Mexican Oleander, a tropical shrub native to much of Mexico and Central America, is able to be pruned into a small tree. Not the traditional oleander (*Nerium oleander*) in the same plant family; it is part of the Apocynaceae or dogbane family, which also includes Vinca, plumeria, and desert rose.

The white flowering form is unusual for this plant, usually known for yellow or peach colored bell-shaped blossoms 2-3 inches long. It flowers consistently May through October, but is susceptible to heavy freezes, damaging foliage when temperatures dip to the low 20s, but with no severe dieback. Larger specimens quickly recover and re-leaf.

Mexican oleander has narrow bright green leaves 3 to 4 inches long and ¼ to ½ inch wide. Foliage grows quickly in moist soil, its rapid growth weighing down branches, requiring pruning several times a year to maintain desired form. It also is known as “lucky nut” because of the large shiny seed inside the green fruit. This variety, like most in this family, are toxic with cardiac glycosides in all plant parts.

See White Mexican Oleander at entrance to Anderson Bromeliad Conservatory. A peach form is located at Visitors Center entrance.



TEXAS FROGFRUIT (*Phyla nodiflora*)

Texas Frogfruit is a great low-growing native groundcover for local landscapes. It quickly grows to just 6-10 inches tall, producing clusters of tiny white flowers almost year-round. Closer inspection shows the individual eighth-inch white blossoms are part of longer tubular flowers with yellow throats. Blossoms emerge from green, round inch-long flower stalks which blossom for weeks, making a consistent pollinator nectar source. Narrow inch-long semi-succulent leaves are abundant year-round, drought-resistant once established.

A single plant can spread 18-24 inches across, with multiple plants creating a thick bed of lush green foliage sprinkled with white flowers. Its low-growing habit requires little pruning throughout the year except to keep outer edges in bounds.

Frogfruit is native to 23 southern states and deep into tropical Americas. As a native, it can be seen in some rarely-considered spaces, including shallow dry ditches and thinning turf areas, especially noticeable in winter when butterflies seek nectar on warm, sunny winter days. Unfortunately, keeping Frogfruit in grassy areas means living with other broadleaf weeds which cohabitate.

See Frogfruit purposefully planted in Butterfly Garden and adjacent Butterfly Hill; but also found growing naturally in many native short grassy areas at the Botanical Gardens.

