

## WHAT'S BLOOMING?

(week of September 20, 2020)

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center currently cannot offer Saturday morning educational seminars, weekend Rep-Tales and Parrot Talk, or Orchid-ology series, due to State of Texas COVID-19 "gathering" restrictions, as well as health and safety of our guests.

Carrying out its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, the Botanical Gardens brings us **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlighting a featured blooming plant in the Exhibit Area; and native in or near the Habitat and Trails area—to enjoy on a visit this week, and even consider for your landscape!

### **COMPACT BLUE PORTERWEED** (*Stachytarpheta mutabilis* formerly *S. jamaicensis*)

Porterweed, a member of the Verbenaceae family (*Verbenaceae*), comes in blue, red, coral/pink, and white, blooming from spring until frost. Although frequently rated as Zone 10, it is a perennial in our slightly colder Zone 9 region, and an annual further north.

Porterweed provides dense, bushy growth up to 6 feet high and 4-6 feet wide. The blue "compact" form, also known as *Jamaican Vervain*, usually only grows to about 4-5 feet and not quite as wide as other colors. Porterweed usually grows to 3 feet the first year and to maturity the second year. It grows in full sun and partial shade, but in shade it will get taller, blooming less. Each flower spike can be 6-12 inches long with tiny half-inch flowers opening up the stalk, a few each day, replacing spent blossoms further down. A single stalk may have 120-180 blossoms from the beginning of its bloom cycle through completion, but only a few are open on each stalk during a single day. However, each branch typically is in bloom providing a lot of color over the entire bush. The long, thin, green flower stalks resembling green garden snakes may be why it is called snake plant in some regions.



Porterweed is a good butterfly and hummingbird nectar plant with consistent bloom throughout the season.

**Blue and coral Porterweed is prominent in the Botanical Gardens' Butterfly Garden.**

### **WILD OLIVE TREE** (*Cordia boissieri*)

Wild Olive also goes by Mexican Olive, Texas Olive, and Anacahuita. A deep South Texas/Mexico native grown in landscapes up to San Antonio and Central Texas, they are susceptible to hard freezes further north. This great Xeriscape plant used in water-wise landscapes in South Texas need good drainage, as standing water will kill the root system.

It is a small, ornamental tree with large green leaves approximately 4 X 6 inches and a stringy, coarse bark creating an attractive trunk. Trees frequently grow 12-15 feet tall and about 15-20 feet across at maturity, producing dense shade, sometimes limiting grass growth beneath if clustered with other trees. Wild Olives have clusters of 1 ½ - 2 inch white blossoms with deep throats and yellow centers, flowering nearly year-round in our area. Blossoms have high nectar content so are great hummingbird attractors, providing a natural nectar source, particularly during fall migration. Pollinated flowers develop into green fruit resembling an olive. While technically edible, it is not very palatable. The common name "olive" is just a visual observation, with this tree in a completely different family than the common edible olives (*Olea europaea*) used in cooking.



Finding large specimen trees in nurseries can be difficult, but a 4-5 foot tree will grow rapidly in its second and third year, once roots expand.

**See Wild Olives blooming in the Botanical Gardens' Sensory Garden.**