

In a Desert Garden

Tradescantia - Wandering Jew

There are countless varieties in this plant family and several of them do quite well in our climate. They freeze to the ground, but recover quickly. They also make great house plants. Outside in my garden the plants are mostly grown in hanging baskets or as ground covers. In the house I have a *Tradescantia pallida* 'Purpurea' or Purple Queen in a hanging pot, and it is a monster. In my outside entry, I grow it in the ground. There it is not doing too well. It is a very dark spot and it would do better with more light. In the house the hanging pot is in my sunroom where it grows to be a monster every year and needs to be cut back severely. This *Tradescantia* variety is very impressive with its purple leaves and its pale pink flowers. It is native to Mexico.

Another pretty variety, *T. albiflora* or Wandering Jew, has green elongated leaves and small white flowers that come in drifts. This plant does well in sun or shade, is a strong grower, and needs a haircut from time to time to make it more compact. My plant is outside all year long. In the deep freeze we had a few years ago all my outside *Tradescantias* froze and I thought I had lost them, but they have come back. Now on below freezing nights, I cover those in pots with sheets of burlap. There are several variegated forms in this variety: green and white leaves, red and green ones, and green and yellow ones. The Wandering Jew is native to South America.

There is a plant that looks a lot like a Wandering Jew, only more



like a miniature variety. It is the 'Tahitian Bridal Veil'. Some of these have green leaves, some have purple leaves and an abundance of white flowers. This plant is not a *Tradescantia*, it is *Gibasis geniculata*.

I also grow one very unusual *Tradescantia*. Unfortunately, I cannot find any record of it in my books, but this must be my favorite. The leaves on this one are grayish-green and velvety, and the flowers are sky blue. I have several big pots all over my yard filled with a variety of these plants, as they are easy to grow and take care of. They are drought tolerant and easy to propagate. To make more just cut off some of the long stems and stick them into a vase with water, and in no time they root and can be planted. They make good additions to planters with a variety of plants in them.

Angel Rutherford. Master Gardener
Photographer



Cuttings 'N' Clippings

✿ CCMGA will hold its next meeting on **Thursday, March 6**, in the Public Meeting Room in Groth Hall at UASV, from **5:00—7:00 p.m.** The speaker will be Maryhelen Henthorn, talking with us about her tips for successful tomato gardening, her favorite varieties for our climate, and her "not-so-favorites." Then, she'll break out the cooking pans and demonstrate two of her favorite recipes for "garden-to-stove" dishes. As always, the public is welcome.

✿ The next Water Wise talk will be **Saturday, March 1, 9-11:00 a.m.** titled **Basics of Drip Irrigation**. Wondering about your drip irrigation system? Want to put one in? Come learn about the parts of a drip irrigation system and water/soil relationships. The presenter will be Dr. Stephen Poe, UA Extension Specialist, and the location is the University of Arizona Sierra Vista, 1140 N. Colombo Ave, Sierra Vista, AZ.

For information call (520) 458-8278, Ext 2141, or contact Joyce at: jwilliam@ag.arizona.edu
You can visit Water Wise at: waterwise.arizona.edu

✿ *High on the Desert*

It's not too late to register for the 21st High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference to be held March 14 & 15 at Cochise College. Information, including the Conference registration form, is available here: <http://cals.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/events.htm>

Did You Know . . .

Tohono Chul Spring Plant Sale will be held on Saturday, March 22 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday, March 23 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at 7356 N. Paseo Del Norte, Tucson. For info: www.tohonocho.org

At a Glance Box

It's a Bloomin' Cochise County Native Plant of the Month

Plant: Fremont cottonwood, *Populus fremontii*

Description: Large, deciduous tree

Blooms: Early spring

Use: Excellent riparian forest tree

Culture: Native to southwestern U.S. rivers and streams. Must have a constant available water supply.

Other: Not recommended for a landscape plant. Weak wood, short lived.

Learn more: Cochise County Herbarium,

www.cochisecountyherbarium.org

For an in-depth article, see below.

Cado Daily

Water Resources Coordinator, Water Wise Program

University of Arizona Cochise County Cooperative Extension

Fremont cottonwood

Here in Cochise County, we get blizzards – guaranteed twice a year even when the temperatures are above freezing and the sky is robin's egg blue. They typically occur once in February or March and once in October or November.

The “snow” is a bit different from the wet stuff paralyzing parts of the U.S. this year. Ours is dry and floats around in the air until it lands on the ground or goes up your nose (or so it seems) .

OK, it isn't really snow or a blizzard, but it seems like it because the seeds of two plants take to the air with great gusto and fill it with white floating stuff. Coincidentally, we sneeze.

In the November 2013 newsletter issue, I wrote about the Desert broom, *Baccharis sarothroides*, when the female plant releases profuse amounts of seeds carried on the wind by silky white hairs called “pappus.”

Our other season of “snow” occurs in the early spring from the cottonwood trees (appropriately named!).

These majestic trees are “phreatophytes” or “riparian obligates” meaning that they are naturally found near surface or shallow sub-surface water. In the Sierra Vista Subwatershed, a forest of cottonwoods intermixed with willow trees creates a verdant canopy along the San Pedro River.

In the spring, usually before the leaves emerge, the female cottonwood (*Populus* are in the Willow Family, *Salicaceae*, whose members are dioecious meaning that the male and female flowers are on separate plants) disperses piles of seeds nestled in cottony down.

The other plant part that flies around in the wind that is not as visible, is the pollen from the male plant released by catkins. Achoo! This is what causes allergic reactions in some people, not

the cottony fluff (it is too big to go up noses. Most noses anyway.).

Cottonwood trees make terrible landscape plants. Besides being prolific pollen producers, there are several other reasons why cottonwoods are best left to grow in their natural environment.

If you take a walk along the river in the spring when the cottonwoods are blooming, your shoes will begin to collect sticky, resinous buds that have fallen off the trees. Sticking to the buds that are sticking to your shoes are catkins that look like knobby brown or green strings and caught up in the catkins are clumps of cottony white hairs and sticking to the hairs are small seeds. If you have a cottonwood in your yard, all of that is quite a mess to clomp into your house.

As you walk the river, you will also notice A LOT of dead, fallen cottonwood branches. Along with copious amounts of sticky buds, pollen and cottony seeds, cottonwoods drop branches because the tree grows fast resulting in weak wood. If you look at some of the older cottonwoods at the river, you will see terrific hiding places for animals because much of the tree's inner core has disintegrated. Wind storms are known to easily break branches off cottonwoods. Great tree for those in the roof repair business!

If the above reasons to not grow a cottonwood in your yard aren't enough, maybe your water bill will be the best reason. If a cottonwood doesn't get enough water, it struggles (and the branches and leaves

(Continued on page 6)

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Jeffrey C. Silvertooth, Associate Dean & Director, Economic Development & Extension, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, The University of Arizona. The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation in its programs and activities.

The information given herein is supplied with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by Cooperative Extension is implied.

Any products, services, or organizations that are mentioned, shown, or indirectly implied in this publication do not imply endorsement by the University of Arizona.

(Continued from page 5)

fall off, etc.). Additionally, considering a mature cottonwood can have a trunk bigger than you can hug and a proportionally enormous canopy, watering at the drip line can take a mile or so of soaker hose (just kidding—I think). Even gray water from the washing machine won't be enough water to support a cottonwood.

We are very lucky that Mother Nature has these magnificent trees in HER yard. A cottonwood forest is rare in the southwest and the riparian habitat for migratory and resident birds is unequalled. If you have a chance to take a walk in this cottonwood “blizzard” down at the San Pedro River this spring, do. It is a special place, but don't bring any cottonwoods home on your shoes.

*Cado Daily, M.A.
Water Resources
Coordinator*



Fremont cottonwood—Photo courtesy
<http://extension.arizona.edu/yavapai/county/> web site



Ramsey canyon cottonwood, winter 2014
Photo courtesy Gary Gruenhagen

March Reminders

- ◆ Prune roses
- ◆ Start seeds indoors
- ◆ Check cactus for fungus
- ◆ Plant cool-season veggies
- ◆ Reconsider your water usage
- ◆ (Call Water Wise for a free audit—520-458-8278, Ext 2139)
- ◆ Remove and replace winter mulches

Ask a Master Gardener

Cochise County Master Gardeners are available to answer your gardening questions either by telephone call to the Cooperative Extension Office or on-line on our web site at:

<http://ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/question.htm>

Although we have had a mild winter so far, it is still possible to have a late frost. The following comes from our web site's Frequently Asked Questions:

Question: How can I tell if my apples, pear, peach, cherry and apricot flowers suffered freeze damage from freezing temperatures?

Answer: Most of the fruit mentioned will freeze if in full bloom during temperatures from 23 to 28° F. To examine a flower or fruit, remove one from the tree. Make a horizontal cut with a knife through the base of the flower just beneath where the flower petals are attached. If small fruits have already formed, cut horizontally through them, also. If the center of flower or fruitlet seed tissue is brown in the center then the flower or seed(s) is/are dead. If the flower or seed tissue is green, they are alive. If the seed(s) die then the hormonal stimulus that the seed(s) produce which signals fruit growth will not occur; therefore no fruit will be produced. Go around each tree and cut 10 or 20 flowers or fruitlets to determine the percent of survival. If only 5 to 10% of peach flowers survived there will be a crop. If only 10 to 20% of apple or pears survived you will have a full crop. If more survive you will probably have to thin the fruit in a few weeks to produce large fruit. If thinning is not done either by man or Mother Nature's freezes, small, inferior fruit will be produced.