Native or not? What’s in a Name?

I might come across as skeptical or negative about the “native” status of plants commonly sold in the nursery trade, but there is reason to be wary if you are interested in landscaping with natives. I find there is a lot of misinformation about the species of plants being sold in the broader market. At Desert Survivors we are far from perfect, but we try hard to stay up with taxonomic changes in order to remain properly informed and sell the “real deal.”

Although management staff in many plant nurseries may find the listing of varieties and subspecies to be cumbersome unnecessary information more convenient to leave out, ignoring subspecies and varieties will often lump nonnatives with natives. Here are a few examples of plants that are commonly sold locally as native plants, that usually are not native at all.

First, “native” mesquites sold in the nursery trade are typically grown from hybridized seed, mostly because buying hybrid seed is a lot more convenient for the grower, as hybrid seed is what is most available, and to get pure local seeds, they would have to get out into the field and collect the seed themselves.

Second, virtually all desert willows sold in Arizona are actually *Chilopsis linearis* subsp. *linearis*, which is not native to Arizona. (The native desert willow, *Chilopsis linearis* subsp. *arbuscula*, is grown out and sold at Desert Survivor’s, however.)

Finally, most cacti sold in nurseries are either brokered out of California or the seeds purchased originate from southern California. What this means is that the species many people are buying is actually from the Mojave Desert population, which has a different chromosome, instead of the Sonoran Desert population native in Tucson or the Chihuahuan Desert population native in Cochise County. More information is often better than less.

Jim Verrier
Director of Plant Nursery

Executive Director’s Report

Another spring is upon us, and Desert Survivors continues to do well. My report starts with a major “Thanks!” to all our members and friends.

You may remember that in my fall report I announced a fund-raising campaign involving the Arizona State Tax Credit for donations to the working poor. Well, the campaign was a huge success! Because we don’t sell many plants in winter, the donations were particularly meaningful, and the infusion of cash to Desert Survivors helped us out in our toughest part of the year. What I like most about this system of contributing through a tax credit is that our members and friends don’t have to donate money they may need to get through these tough financial times. Instead, they are able to redirect a portion of taxes they had already incurred, turning those funds into a donation to Desert Survivors. I love a good win-win situation.

On another, sadder note, we also had some bad news this winter. Lois Grimes passed away in early January. Lois worked for Desert Survivors for 15 years, and was one of the most talented professionals who has ever worked here. She created and implemented a residential program for a young man that provided a quality of life for him that he had never known before. That successful program was just one of her many deeply appreciated accomplishments at Desert Survivors. She will be greatly missed, but the standard of excellence she set for services to our clients will live forever.

The Spring Plant Sale is almost here, and I would like people to pay particular attention to the changes in sale days. Members’ presale, still opens on a Saturday—March 9th, and it will continue on Tuesday, March 12 through Saturday—March 16th. The Public Sale begins Tuesday March 12th and also runs through Saturday March 16th. Although we won’t be open on the Sundays, the extended sale days through the week give the community extra shopping days to get in on sale prices. Don’t forget that we will be closed on the Sundays (March 10th and March 17th), a day that we have typically been open for business for the spring and fall plant sales in previous years.

Again, “thank you” to all our members, friends, and customers for all your support throughout the year. See you at the sale!

Richard M. Bechtold
Executive Director
Featured Plants Spring 2013

Pseudomorphophyllum levenecephalum
(Asteraceae, Sunflower Family)
white cudweed, Sonora everlasting
Most of our cudweeds are annual and typically don’t get people too excited about cultivating them, but this is a beautiful perennial species. White cudweed has whitish-silver foliage that smells very much like lemon. During the monsoon, large white flowerheads of these plants can handle full sun or partial shade. It is found in the wild between 3,500 and 5,000 feet elevation in southeastern Arizona. It occurs throughout southeastern Arizona and is listed in the Monsoon ecosystems. The largest sedge in Arizona, although I have only seen plants about 3-4 feet in size in the wild. In Arizona, this plant has a rare plant listing (S2) on NatureServe and it is listed in the Arizona Rare Plant Guide (2002). There has been debate on whether this species is actually just Carex sp., which is how the Flora of North America recently classified it. Whatever you want to call it, it is a beautiful aquatic sedge, growing in large clumps with long leaves, that would look great in any water or pond feature. It’s very easy to grow when kept wet, and would prefer a few hours of afternoon shade if possible. It is found in the wild between 3,500 and 6,000 feet elevation.

Carex ultra
(Cyperaceae, Sedge Family)
Cochise sedge
We are excited to finally offer this rare aquatic plant at the nursery. Cochise sedge is notorious for having the largest inflorescence or flowering head of any sedge in Arizona. It is also noted as the largest sedge in Arizona, although I have only seen plants about 3-4 feet in size in the wild. In Arizona, this plant has a rare plant listing (S2) on NatureServe and it is listed in the Arizona Rare Plant Guide (2002). There has been debate on whether this species is actually just Carex sp., which is how the Flora of North America recently classified it. Whatever you want to call it, it is a beautiful aquatic sedge, growing in large clumps with long leaves, that would look great in any water or pond feature. It’s very easy to grow when kept wet, and would prefer a few hours of afternoon shade if possible. It is found in the wild between 3,500 and 6,000 feet elevation.

Senecio Salignus
(Asteraceae, Sunflower Family)
willowleaf groundsel
We’re grateful to our friend and Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum docent, David Wrench, for bringing us seeds of this lovely plant several years ago. Willowleaf groundsel is a good-sized shrub that can reach up to 3 feet in height. It is one of hundreds of yellow-flowering composites but is unusual in blooming in the wintertime and being very cold hardy, a good fit for Tucson landscapes. These plants typically come into full bloom in January or February. Freshly planted one-gallon specimens in my yard that were covered in flower buds were completely unaffected by our recent cold snap. Willowleaf groundsel is found between 2,500 and 5,000 feet elevation in southeastern Arizona, near moist areas. In cultivation, these plants have moderate water needs, and it can handle full sun but would appreciate a few hours of afternoon shade.

Peritoma arborea
(= Isomeris arbores or Cleome isomeris)
(Capparaceae, Caper Family)
Bladderpod, Coastal Bladderpod, Bladder- pod Spiderflower
This native to California and Baja California occurs between 0 and 4,000 feet elevation, in full sun and well-drained soil. It is a shrub up to 5 feet tall and possibly 3-4 feet in size in the wild. In Arizona, this plant has a rare plant listing (S2) on NatureServe and it is listed in the Arizona Rare Plant Guide (2002). There has been debate on whether this species is actually just Cleome sp., which is how the Flora of North America recently classified it. Whatever you want to call it, it is a beautiful aquatic sedge, growing in large clumps with long leaves, that would look great in any water or pond feature. It’s very easy to grow when kept wet, and would prefer a few hours of afternoon shade if possible. It is found in the wild between 3,500 and 6,000 feet elevation.

Zinnia grandiflora
(Asteraceae, Sunflower Family)
Zinnia grandiflora, a yellow-flowered plant in the Aster Family
We're grateful to our friend and Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum docent, David Wrench, for bringing us seeds of this lovely plant several years ago. Willowleaf groundsel is a good-sized shrub that can reach up to 3 feet in height. It is one of hundreds of yellow-flowering composites but is unusual in blooming in the wintertime and being very cold hardy, a good fit for Tucson landscapes. These plants typically come into full bloom in January or February. Freshly planted one-gallon specimens in my yard that were covered in flower buds were completely unaffected by our recent cold snap. Willowleaf groundsel is found between 2,500 and 5,000 feet elevation in southeastern Arizona, near moist areas. In cultivation, these plants have moderate water needs, and it can handle full sun but would appreciate a few hours of afternoon shade.

Karen Wilson
Director of Program Services

Desert Survivors is in the process of updating the taxonomic nomenclature for many species at the nursery, so don’t be alarmed if, on your next visit, you’re not finding the plant you were looking for, or if you notice that one of your favorite plants has been awarded a new, crappy name by some far-away scientist! Just ask us if you need any help finding the right plant.

Program Services
Spring brings us all a sense of renewal. It is a time to reflect on the months past and start new projects with renewed enthusiasm.

This spring brings a lot of changes in Children’s Services. These changes have been talked about, mulled over, and piloted over nearly ten years, and they are finally being put into place. We will soon be delivering services to families in a new way based on studies showing that the most effective intervention practices are developed in keeping with the fact that children/infants learn best in the natural routines of their families. This means that instead of telling families what we, as “professionals,” think might work for them, we work interactively with the families, letting them guide us by telling us what works or doesn’t in their busy day. After determining that a child is eligible for services through the Arizona Early Intervention Program (AEIP), a whole team of professionals is available for them to consult with. The team assigns one person to take the lead with the family, but every other team member is available to consult with until the child is no longer eligible (eligibility ends on the third birthday). This approach is called “The Team Based Model.” Desert Survivors is partnering with the Easter Seals Blake Foundation (ESBF) to provide support through this model to families all across Pima County. We are so excited to be using this model. A transition period between March 1 and April 30 will give us time to assure all families are moving into this new model (unless the child’s third birthday is very close and they are leaving the program anyway).

In Adult Services, it has been a long winter. We have used this cool season to do lots of clean-up around the Nursery and to work on much-needed repairs. Our strong team of Mentors continues to do an awesome job of teaching and guiding our adult clients in the many different tasks needed to maintain our beautiful nursery. It is heartening to see the pride our clients take in the work they do every day.

We are thrilled to report that one of their projects, that of helping maintain and clean the river parks, will continue, as our partnership with Pima County has been renewed for another year. Our guys love going out to the river parks and they are doing such an awesome job out there. Please take a minute to say “hi” if you are out walking and spot one of our crew. You can’t miss us, we are the guys with the lime-green vests that say “Desert Survivors” on the back! Finally, thanks to some extraordinary people at the Stonewall Foundation, we were able to retain two employees who lost their State funding some time ago, and we will also be able to keep two additional workers who will be losing their funding this spring. Without the support of the Stonewall Foundation, all four of these gentleman would have lost their jobs. We are grateful to the Stonewall Foundation.

On a personal note, I get to be “Grandma” for the first time this year! My husband and I are expecting our first grandchild in August, and I can hardly wait. Thanks again to all of you for your continued support and love of this amazing place that is Desert Survivors. See you at the sale.

Karen Wilson
Director of Program Services