

Showy Yellow Evening Primrose grows near Valley Morning Star offices in Harlingen.



FLORA FACTS

Scientific Name: *Oenothera grandis*

Common Names: Showy Yellow Evening Primrose

Family: Onagraceae

Showy Yellow Evening Primrose

The yellow-blooming primroses are a bit hard to distinguish, but regardless of the species they are lovely. Blooming in front of the Valley Morning Star amongst the other wildflowers planted there is Showy Yellow Evening Primrose.

In addition to opening towards evening, this brilliant blossom sometimes opens to herald morning's arrival.

Everitt, Drawe and Lonard include *Oenothera grandis* in "Broad-Leaved Herbaceous Plants of South Texas Used by Livestock and Wildlife" (1999). "The leaves are eaten by white-tailed deer and cattle, and the seeds are consumed by mourning doves and white-winged doves."

This showy annual grows from a taproot. Both stems and leaves are covered in fuzzy pubescence and the leaves are deeply lobed.

The plant family Onagraceae includes a number of Evening Primroses. Another intriguing and descriptive name is "Sundrop." A polaroid filter is handy for photographing these wonderfully reflective flowers.

When reflected light does not obscure vision, one finds eight stamens in each flower. The unique and intricate stigma is deeply 4-lobed.

Showy Evening Primrose grows up to 18 inches tall. Flowers are almost three inches in width. Seeds form in a cylindrical capsule almost 1.5 inches long.

Beach Evening Primrose, *O. drummondii*, also bears large yellow flowers. It can be distinguished from *O. grandis* by examination of the leaves. Those of Beach Evening Primrose are gray hairy and are not deeply lobed.

O. laciniata is the Cut-Leaved Evening Primrose, with smaller yellow flowers, just about 1.5 inches in width. This plant serves as larval food for a type of Hawk or Sphinx Moth, Ann Vacek explained to me recently. Ann is an officer of the Native Plant Project who resides in McAllen. "What kind of caterpillar is this?" I asked her, pointing to a plump and hungry creature. She

pointed out a horn-like projection on the caterpillar's anal region. That, she explained, tells you this caterpillar will become an adult Hawkmoth. Hawk or Sphinx Moths are the creatures which resemble hummingbirds, quick in flight and able to hover, but recognizable as insects by their antennae.

Dr. Richardson states that each of the three yellow-blooming Evening Primroses will flower through spring and summer.

Beach Evening Primrose continues blooming through fall. These are the blooms which open on the dunes in late evening. ("Wildflowers and Other Plants of Texas Beaches and Islands," Alfred Richardson, 2002.)

O. speciosa is the Pink Evening Primrose, Buttercup, or *Amapola del Campo*. One sees masses of the softly-colored pink blooms on many lawns and roadsides. Like the other Primroses, seeds are formed in a hard cylindrical capsule. Attempting to pop these capsules open is quite a chore. Yet, when moisture is abundant, they open spontaneously to reveal numerous seeds as small as a grain of powder.

Wildflower Brochure. I'd like to announce the availability of a newly-published color brochure on "Native Flowers of the Lower Rio Grande Valley." Priced at \$2, this is a resource most of us can afford. It's a handy guide to 48 flowers one may encounter in this area. Butterfly symbols indicate plants which provide food for butterfly larvae. Bird symbols show which of these wildflowers attract birds, with nectar or seed. Some of the included flowers bloom only in springtime; others bloom year-round.

This brochure is available at Valley Nature Center in Weslaco and at local wildlife refuges. Proceeds from sales will help to support those entities. Forty-eight sponsors made this new publication possible, ranging from local and nationwide businesses to community organizations.

This brochure is sized to fit into a pocket. Two other titles in the series are currently available: "Specialty Birds of the LRGV," and "Butterflies of the LRGV." None of these are comprehensive, as we have far more birds, butterflies and flowers than will fit onto a small brochure. But they are an excellent beginning to an appreciation and understanding of the organisms which fly and bloom amongst us.

Butterfly Exhibit. Gorgas Foundation at 510 E. St. Charles in Brownsville announces a world-class collection of butterflies and moths currently on display. Featured is the Glick Lepidoptera Collection, which includes thousands of butterflies from around the world. These were collected over 80 years from six continents. A student collection and a free flight cage with live butterflies are also featured. Educational videos and other activities will also be available.

Exhibit hours are Monday thru Thursday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Fridays from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The exhibit ends on Friday, April 30. For more information, call 504-6862.

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Sphinx Moth Caterpillar eating Oenothera plant. Green Seed Capsules typical of Oenothera on left and right of caterpillar. Yellow Anal "horn" is typical of Sphinx Moth Larvae.