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**Coastal Germander may bloom year-round.  
Look for Coastal Germander near Prickly Pear.**



#### FLORA FACTS

Scientific Name: *Teucrium cubense*  
Common Names: Coastal Germander, Cuban Teucrium  
Family: Labiatae (Mint)

#### **Coastal Germander Edges Prickly Pear**

Coastal Germander is a delightful contrast to much that surrounds it. This delicate, herbaceous mint relative with multitudes of small white blossoms often grows adjacent to prickly pear. For much of this winter, I've found Coastal Germander in bloom. The surroundings were often clay, sometimes cracked and dry.

I've had good success in rescuing this plant from peril.

You'll find it featured in many of the valley's butterfly gardens. An especially beautiful colony greets visitors at the entrance to Frontera Audubon Thicket in Weslaco.

*Teucrium* refers to Teucer, a legendary king in the region of Troy, who employed plants of this genus for medicinal use. The plant was first collected in Cuba, thus the species name *cubense*. On that island, the plant is known as *Yerba del pasmo* and is used for treating gastrointestinal ailments. It is also used for treating digestive complaints in Argentina.

*Teucrium cubense* is often found in coastal areas, thus the common name Coastal Germander. Dr. Alfred Richardson describes this occurrence as "Sandy clay, Padre and Matagorda Islands." Richardson notes the blooming period as "all seasons." (*Wildflowers and Other Plants of Texas Beaches and Islands*, 2002.) Richardson adds: "often there's (Coastal Germander) blooming if there has been any moisture at all."

Mike Heep supplies this data: "I see it in the open arroyo brush where it can get enough sun. Also sometimes on the lomas in the open. You're right, if it's sunny enough for prickly pear, it's right for germander. It's a little finicky in a pot. If it dries out much it loses all of its leaves and dies to the soil level. Usually comes back though."

American Germander, Cuban Teucrium and Small Coast Germander are other common names. I frequently hear the name mispronounced as "gerrymander," as though the plant were capable of influencing political boundaries.

“The name “germander” is a corruption of the ancient Greek name for a related shrubby species. It passed from Greek through Medieval Latin and Old French to English, changing with each step.” (John & Gloria Tveten, *Wildflowers of Houston and Southeast Texas*, 1993.)

The delicate herbaceous nature of this plant might lead one to assume it is an annual species. It has a perennial nature and may thrive for many years, waxing and waning as conditions change.

Correll & Johnston give the most adequate description of this plant’s natural range: “In clay or hard sandy loams, along streams and draws, in palm groves and low grassy soils along the coast and Rio Grande Plains, west to the Trans-Pecos ... from southwestern United States, through West Indies to southern South America.” (*Manual of the Vascular Plants of Texas*, 1979.)

Correll & Johnston also list and describe three varieties of the species, one an annual, the others differing in such characters as how the leaves are lobed. These are differences many observers would not notice.

*Teucrium laciniatum*, quite similar, ranges through West Texas and the Plains Country.

Geyata Agilvsgi has this to say about the plant, conferring another common name: “Cut-Leaf Germander is very showy and deserves a place in wildflower plantings. The finely cut foliage appears almost fernlike, and the plants are especially attractive in borders or massed plantings. In its native range, the plant forms large colonies from creeping roots and is sometimes considered rather weedy.” (*Wildflowers of Texas*, 2002.)

If all my weeds were so showy, I’d rest easy.

New flowers continue to open from apical tips on this plant, as seeds mature lower on the stem. A black nutlet of four seeds is formed from each bloom, typical of the Mint family.

Around the globe, many species of *Teucrium* are known hostplants for butterflies and moths, though I find no specific reference on how winged insects use *Teucrium cubense*.

We may well have the Pack Rat to thank for maintaining habitat for Coastal Germander.

Pack Rats often make their homes beneath extensive colonies of Prickly Pear and are known to consume woody plants. We became painfully aware of that at Ramsey Park after planting woody species in barren areas near Prickly Pear. Pack Rat nests can be seen beneath many of them and the rats often scurry in and out as folks pass by.

Some of the newly-planted things were eaten to the ground. Others bear the tell-tale marks of rodent teeth and their survival is dubious. Almost nothing we planted near the Prickly Pear was uneaten or unchewed.

I have no idea why Pack Rats allow Coastal Germander to persist near their nests. I tried a leaf today and it tasted fine. Perhaps Pack Rats have a different sense of taste or perhaps they aren’t bothered much by digestive ailments.

By eating emerging shrubs and trees near his home, the Pack Rat maintains the full-sun habitat required by his living shelter: the Prickly Pear.

Prickly Pear is also a primary food source for the Pack Rat. Ramsey Park volunteers and visitors have been intrigued by the Pack Rat’s ability to eat the cacti. They eat the surface of the uppermost pads. Granted, the uppermost pads are the tastiest, but imagine climbing around on a Prickly Pear and hanging up there to eat!

Dick Roesler showed me a Pack Rat’s den in a large mulch pile, with multiple entryways protected from marauding predators by piles of Prickly Pear spines.

I don’t think I can outsmart a Pack Rat, so I’m coming up with a different planting strategy. I’ll plant the sort of things I find adjacent to Prickly Pear in other places, like Coastal Germander.

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