



Christina Mild  
**RIO DELTA WILD**

FLORA FACTS

Scientific Name: *Verbesina encelioides*

Common Names: Cowpen Daisy

Family: Asteraceae (Sunflower)

**Cowpen Daisy Resists Drought**

Cowpen Daisy blooms admirably during summer's hottest, dry months. It is well-suited to open, disturbed areas and is resistant to drought.

This pretty and easily-grown wildflower is an annual. It can be transplanted successfully or grown from seed.

Butterflies enjoy the nectar.

Bordered Patch butterflies may select Cowpen Daisy for egg-laying. It is one of several acceptable larval food plants for them. The flat seeds are eaten by bobwhite quail and Rio Grande turkeys.

Delena Tull mentions the plant's potential benefits in "Edible and Useful Plants of Texas and the Southwest," stating that the seeds are high in oil content.

Grazers tend to avoid the plant if other graze is available. The toxin galegine causes poisoning in livestock if Cowpen Daisy is ingested in large quantities. When mixed in hay or other feed, the threat of livestock poisoning is increased.

Signs of low-dose poisoning in livestock include dullness and anorexia. More serious poisoning effects are severe lesions on internal organs, internal hemorrhaging and death.

Cowpen Daisy often grows as a profusion of plants. Other species may not be able to germinate or grow due to "allelopathic effects." This means that toxins are produced by the plant, inhibiting the growth of other species. These effects have not been long-lasting in my yard. I simply pull out the old plants and replace them with other things.

Mike Heep tells me: "Some plants don't show a lot of allelopathic effects until they've been on the same land for a while."

Cowpen Daisy is susceptible to a number of plant viruses. Leaves often develop an unattractive powdery appearance late in the season. When this happens, I pull and dispose of them. If conditions are favorable for growth, they will re-seed.

The Hawaiian Ecosystems at Risk Project has summarized a great deal of research regarding this plant and posted that report on the world-wide web. Much of this article's content is from that source.

The accepted native range of Cowpen Daisy includes Mexico, Texas, Arizona and North Dakota. It is found at elevations from 0 feet to 9000 feet. Open areas and disturbed habitats appear to be ideal.

Because human disturbance has increased at an exorbitant rate, Cowpen Daisy has become established and invasive in many places, including remote islands important to breeding birds. Colonies of the plant pose some peril for nesting Christmas Shearwater and Laysan Albatross. Chicks become entangled amongst the weed and their ability to fledge is hindered by this excessive growth.

Texas peanut farmers also note negative effects of Cowpen Daisy on yields of the peanut crop.

Thus, a number of studies on control methods have been published. Control with herbicide is generally effective. In areas where a few plants are to be controlled, they can be easily pulled up, root and all.

Cowpen Daisy is a good choice for many revegetation sites in the local area. Perhaps the allelopathic properties of this pretty daisy might lessen the re-growth of guinea and buffel grass where those grasses have been recently removed.

This allelopathic effect is not especially strong, however. At Valley Nature Center in Weslaco, Cowpen Daisy grows in several spots where surrounding vegetation is quite diverse.

The pretty composite is an especially good choice where irrigation is not available, as plants will germinate from seed after rain and will need little moisture for continued growth and blooming.

Germination is best if seed is sown on the surface, but seed which is covered as deeply as 2.5 cm. will also germinate.

Seedlings of Cowpen Daisy have been successfully transplanted alongside the entry drive to Ramsey Nature Park in Harlingen. Volunteers from the RGV Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists transplanted seedlings and watered them until they became established.

One might scoff at preparing seedbeds for fall wildflower plantings in the heat of summer, yet this season provides opportunity. I refer you to the Spring 2004 issue of "native plants," the member magazine of Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center based in Austin. In an article entitled "Go to Seed," one finds excellent tips regarding such a project.

To prepare a seedbed for fall planting, one may cover the area with a light-blocking weed barrier such as black plastic. Water the area well before covering. Heat and moisture trapped beneath the weed barrier will encourage germination of any weedy seeds. The sprouted seeds will eventually die without sunlight. Heat and humidity beneath the weed-block will encourage fungi, furthering the demise of remaining seed. This is a crucial step, as weed control is the biggest obstacle to growing an attractive wildflower garden.

This same publication includes excellent articles on several other subjects. These include the use of controlled burns in destroying unwanted plant material and remaining seed. Few of us have the luxury of legally conducting a controlled burn. Such a burn might be the best way to destroy the large biomass and accumulated seed of invasive grass species in rural areas where fire is allowed. My family witnessed such a burn in Yosemite on a recent visit to the park. Introduced, invasive grasses are a real problem in Yosemite, as they are in much of the country. There was plenty of personnel on-hand with ample equipment to keep things in control.

Restoring native plant materials to roadsides is another included topic. It seems that Iowa is a leader in this effort, using native roadside plantings to reduce erosion and increase wildlife diversity in the state. The use of invasive species on highway right-of-ways has enabled many pest plants to spread into farms and ranches throughout the U.S. A.

Sounds like Iowa roads might be quite a scenic drive.

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