



Christina Mild  
**RIO DELTA WILD**

“Granjeno offers fruit in many seasons.”

**FLORA FACTS**

Scientific Name: *Celtis pallida*

Common Names: Granjeno, Spiny Hackberry

Family: Ulmaceae

**Look for Verdin Nesting in Granjeno**

Granjeno fruit tastes a bit like melon. One may find the small, light-orange fruit in almost any season of the year. The shape of the fruit is that of a tiny pumpkin.

On July 10, 2003, in Harlingen’s Arroyo Park brush, Granjeno was loaded with tiny blooms and visited by myriad pollinators. Just

several weeks before, Granjeno at Ramsey Park was loaded with fruit. Rain was plentiful during early July in some parts of Harlingen, causing several kinds of trees and shrubs to burst forth in bloom.

Granjeno produces fruit many times during a rainy year, regardless of season. It is undoubtedly a primary food source for many kinds of local wildlife.

How does one recognize Granjeno when the small orange fruit has been devoured? The plant is spiny and quite common on the Lower Rio Grande Delta. Leaves are alternate along the spiny, zigzagging branches. Leaf shape is dependably variable. Leaves are almost symmetrical, but not quite. Some leaves have many teeth along their margins, others have few. Some are toothed along one edge and not along the other, or toothed at the tip but not at the base, and vice versa.

Many leaves will show evidence of insect munching. Multitudes of butterflies depend upon Granjeno as a larval food plant: American Snout, Red-bordered Metalmark and Emperors. Native nurseryman Mike Heep received a frantic call sometime back from a fellow raising butterflies in Houston. Larvae had devoured all the available Granjeno and he needed an overnight express of fresh cuttings.

One would not plant Granjeno as a specimen plant, but rather as a fortress for wildlife. Most would not comment “What a pretty Plant!” but rather “Look at all the tiny fruit!”

In expansive brushy tracts, stands of Granjeno often form arched passageways. Friends who spent their childhood in the brush relate excellent adventure ambling through those spiny confines.

*Common South Texas Shrubs* (Taylor, Rutledge & Herrera, 1994) gives an extensive account of wildlife use of Spiny Hackberry, proclaiming it an “excellent wildlife food and cover plant.” Leaves and stems are browsed by white-tailed deer. Fruit is eaten by “white-wing doves, mourning doves, bobwhite quail, scaled quail, cactus wrens, cardinals, pyrrhuloxias, towhees, mockingbirds, thrashers and green jays.” In addition to providing carbohydrates and protein, the fruit is an important source of water for birds and many mammals.

Mammals which utilize the leaves as forage include white-tailed deer, cattle, sheep, and goats. Coyotes, raccoons, cottontail rabbits and jackrabbits consume the berries.

One might never have need of planting Granjeno, as birds are so adept at spreading this favored food source beneath favored roosting spots.



The thorny nature of Granjeno makes it painful to pull seedlings from unwanted places. My solution for unwanted seedlings is to chop them down or prune them into control. Digging is a more permanent solution, undoubtedly undertaken by the most wise and strong among us.

This same thorniness makes Spiny Hackberry a protected roosting and nesting spot for birds. Verdins are reported to prefer it as a nest-building

site. Most would welcome a family of wee Verdins to our yard, especially the male with his bright yellow headdress.

If you have Granjeno near your home, you may have a family of Verdins without knowing it. My husband once pointed out a brightly-festooned male about a foot away from me, perched at eye-level. I was apparently distracted by a plant and failed to notice the wee bird. I'd been hoping to see a Verdin for years.

This, of course, is why it's nice to participate in fieldtrips. With so many eyes peering around, you discover many things which might have gone unnoticed.

Perhaps even the most hard-hearted among us might select a corner where these spiny plants could grow. They're especially useful as a living and formidable fence.

Technical assistance by Mike Heep, native plant nurseryman and UTPA Instructor.

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