



Christina Mild  
**RIO DELTA WILD**

“Pearl Milkweed Vine in Arroyo Park woods in spring.”

#### FLORA FACTS

Scientific Name: *Matelea reticulata*  
Common Names: Pearl Milkweed Vine  
Family: Asclepiadaceae

#### **Pearl Milkweed Vine Bears Jewels**

Milkweeds, of course, attract a number of butterflies: monarchs, queens, viceroys, soldiers, and other echelons of Lepidopteran royalty. *Matelea reticulata*, besides potentially attracting such jewels, is a gem unto itself.

Green flowers may not seem all that gorgeous, but most agree that those of Pearl Milkweed Vine are attractively unique. In the center of each star-shaped flower is a small silver or pearl-like dot. This is a gynostegium (made up of fused parts of the stamens and pistil) found in members of the milkweed family. Conspicuous reticulate patterns add ornate detail to the flower's surface. Blooming may occur in spring, summer or fall.

Adding to this gemlike quality, Pearl Milkweed is encountered less frequently than many other species of locally-native vine. Indeed, in dry weather, it may almost disappear. Mike Heep recommends looking for it in old growth areas, places which are relatively undisturbed.

Jann Miller was very successful in growing Pearl Milkweed at Valley Nature Center (VNC) in Weslaco. It became an especially nice “cover-up” for a pile of brush. Most of us realize that brush piles attract many kinds of small birds and offer shelter to insect-eating lizards. Few of us savor the sight of a brush pile. Indeed, everyone who “helps” in my yard tries to discard my prized brush piles as though they were nothing more valuable than trash.

Pearl Milkweed Vine also grows high into the trees in VNC's nature park, near the chosen nesting area of yellow-crowned night herons. It's easiest to find the vine when the typical milkweed elongated, split seedpods are present.

A deep upper notch in the heart-shaped leaf helps to distinguish this vine from other species with similar leaves. Surfaces of the leaves and stem are covered with hair, long hairs and short ones, too.

Other species of *Matelia*, with slightly different star-shaped flowers, occur in other parts of Texas. Marshall Enquist includes beautiful photos of these in *Wildflowers of the Texas Hill Country* (1987).

*Cynanchum racemosum*, with a similar leaf-shape, occurs in the LRGV, even in disturbed habitats, sometimes showing up in people's yards. It is easily distinguished from Pearl Milkweed Vine, as it has shiny leaves and is not hairy. It has quite different flowers and grows beautifully in full sun. This vine also grows at Valley Nature Center, near the native plant nursery.

If you have further interest in monarch butterflies or in Texas native milkweed species, I can recommend an excellent website. It is the website of Harlen & Altus Aschen: <http://asclepias.-homestead.com/index.html>. These kind folks provide beautiful photography and lots of information.

My hope is that you may encounter some of nature's gems everyday.

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

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