



Christina Mild  
**RIO DELTA WILD**

“Canela’s blooms brighten summer and fall in seasonally-damp soils.”

**FLORA FACTS**

Scientific Name: *Pluchea odorata*

Common Names: Canela, Marsh Fleabane, Cure-for-all

Family: Compositae

**Marsh Fleabane touted as Cure-for-all**

Years ago, my daughter began a project of photographing wildflowers at Ramsey Park. One of our favorites was Marsh Fleabane, growing near the lowest trail along the Arroyo Colorado’s bank.

The composite blooms of this widely-distributed plant are found in the LRGV from summer through fall, usually in areas having seasonally-damp soil.

Having no large ray flowers, the tightly-packed blooms are tufts of white, pink or violet. Each “corymbose panicle” (as this type of bloom is known) contains over 500 separate disc flowers. Though these lack the flash of a daisy or sunflower, dried cuttings are sold commercially for flower arrangements.

Jesus Franco provides this information about the common Spanish names: “I presume the names *canela* and *canelón* (cinnamon) derive from the brownish aspect this plant gets at some point of its life cycle while every thing else around it remains green.” Jesus is the local Urban Wildlife Biologist for Texas Parks & Wildlife.

Other common names include sourbush, sweetscent, cattle tongue, salvia, cure-for-all and many others derived from several languages.

Dr. Al Richardson calls the plant “Stinkweed,” perhaps his opinion of the odor. (*Wildflowers and Other Plants of Texas Beaches and Islands*, 2002.)

As with any odor, opinions vary widely. Shinnery & Mahler describe plants in the genus *Pluchea* as fragrant. “The foliage is very aromatic with a strong camphor-like smell.” (*Flora of North Central Texas*, 1999.)

My recent encounter with the plant was on South Padre Island, where the Gulf’s waters are currently the temperature of a very pleasant bath.

*Pluchea odorata* is blooming now, along the Convention Center’s boardwalks, and some are close enough for a sniff. Mike Heep saw a massive stand recently at Port Brownsville. About 50-75 yards of *Pluchea* was in bloom along a small drain ditch bank through some salty land.

Native almost throughout Texas, the plant occurs in the southern half of the U.S., extending south to northern South America and the West Indies. It has become naturalized, after introduction into Hawaii, Guam and other Pacific Islands, Taiwan, West Africa, and probably many other places in the tropics.

The common name which alludes to the many medicinal uses of *Pluchea odorata* is “Cure-for-all.” Web search on “Cure-for-all” leads to an excellent research paper by John K. Francis, USDA, working in cooperation with the University of Puerto Rico. Much of the following is from that report. “Cure-for-all has an excellent ability to colonize and stabilize disturbed areas and act as a nurse crop for later-successional species.”



“It has several herbal applications including aromatic baths, control of fever, treatment of uterine fibroids, relief of sore throat and stomach pain, poultices for wounds and skin ulcers, as an analgesic, and for the treatment of malaria...”

This useful and attractive plant is adapted to a wide variety of soils and sites. It tolerates well-drained and poorly-drained soils, a wide variety of soil textures, acid to alkaline conditions, salt, salt spray and even compaction.

One may find the plant in many places in South Texas, as it is common in disturbed areas like construction sites, mown riverbanks, road cuts, eroded sites and abandoned fields.

The species does not tolerate shade or severe competition from brush or grass. In areas where guinea grass is dominant, *Pluchea odorata* has a hard time to compete.

Seeds are wind-dispersed and may require wet, bare soil to germinate and become established.

Some sources report the plant as an annual. In Puerto Rico, most specimens live for 2-4 years and may die back to the root and then resprout.

If you need a reason to visit South Padre Island, this wildflower is as good as any. With any luck at all, you'll spot at least ten bird species on any visit to the boardwalks.

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

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