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RIO DELTA WILD



“Look for Hachinal along undisturbed banks of the Arroyo Colorado.”

FLORA FACTS

Scientific Name: *Heimia salicifolia*

Common Names: Hachinal

Family: Lythraceae (Loosestrife)

Yellow-Tinted Euphoria

Hachinal grows in only five counties in Texas: Cameron, Hidalgo, Kleberg, Starr and Willacy. If it grows on your property, you have something special to be proud of. Having seen the thornless beauty in bloom, you’re already keenly aware of that.

Even in 1923 when Robert Runyon collected specimens at El Jardin in Cameron County, he listed *Heimia salicifolia* as “not common.” In many books where you’d expect to find Hachinal, it is noticeably absent.

I use Hachinal as a marker for the presence of water. In the wild, it often grows where water has stood, or run through, or is still present. Bill Carr of Texas Nature Conservancy sums up the usual habitat as: “Moist soils in partially-shaded sites along resacas, on riverbanks, and in deciduous woodlands on flats on river terraces.” I find the most radiant specimens growing in full sun. They are often in places where patterns of water flow has changed and trees have yet to appear.

Willow-Leaf Heimia is a commonly-published name, though there is no other sort of leaf found on any Heimia for miles around. Only one other species of Heimia is known and it occurs in South America.

Heimia honors a German botanist, perhaps related to the clever soul who invented the “Heimlich Maneuver.”

Hachinal occurs through much of Mexico, southward into South America, and in the West Indies.

Dr. Vines’ *Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of the Southwest* (1960) includes excellent information about Hachinal, including an assortment of conditions for which it has been utilized as a remedy. The most interesting inclusion is that a “juice or decoction” of the plant taken internally produces a “mild and pleasant intoxication during which all objects appear to be yellow.” Please note that this author has not tested and is not recommending such a procedure.

In Tamaulipas, a decoction of the plant is employed as a wash to relieve the effects of poison ivy. (Standley, *Trees and Shrubs of Mexico*. 1920-1926.) That procedure seems harmless enough.

Native Plant Project (NPP) includes Hachinal in *Native Shrubs of the Lower Rio Grande Valley*, p. 21. You'll find that same information at this URL: <http://nativeplantproject.tripod.com/rgvshrub.htm#Hachinal> on the NPP website.

Gene Lester provides these notes: "Hachinal ...is an excellent potted plant. With upright center branches and weeping outer branches, it makes for a very attractive form. Very slow growing. No insect or disease problems. Likes to be watered regularly, thus good for irrigated landscapes. The flowers are very showy, lasting most of the morning and (blooms) almost all year around. Does better in full sun than partial shade. I have not seen any butterflies visit my plants but occasionally our local hummingbirds do."

Mike Heep propagates the plant and has used it in landscaping for many years. He offers these landscaping tips: "It does well in full sun but will take some shade. Likes heavy soil and can stand being wet some. We made a hedge of it out at Bentsen Palm Trailer Park in front of the office. Makes a thick hedge. The seeds will drop and germinate in and around the parent plants. Thus, the hedge will be of hundreds of Hachinal plants. This is what happened at Mr. and Mrs. Matz house on Clifford (in Harlingen). Once it is established, it blooms all of the time."

In Weslaco, Heep planted Hachinal at the Visitor's Center of Frontera Audubon Thicket. Under the directorship of newly-hired Selena King, that center is widening their hours of operation to become more accessible for public visitation (956-968-3275). Selena volunteered at Weslaco's Valley Nature Center (VNC) while I was the VNC's Director. She's knowledgeable and personable and can outwork any three normally productive and active people. If you visit Selena over at Frontera's Thicket, please remind her to drink and eat. If she's standing sideways, you might not spot her right off. If she's working, you'll probably just notice a blur.

If you investigate undisturbed edges of the Arroyo Colorado, you may spot the red-tinged branches of Hachinal, the narrow leaves, intricate seedpods and yellow blooms. The International Boundary Water Commission has recently mown along those edges, making pedestrian access a bit easier. They mowed down many of my favorite plants, including an eight-foot colony of purple-blooming Thornless Thistle (Basket Flower, *Centaurea Americana*). Their instructions must have been to "chop off everything." They shaved a section of arroyo bank right down to dirt.

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

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