

Christina Mild
RIO DELTA WILD

Publication Date: January 25, 2003

“Skeletonleaf Goldeneye is excellent for sun-baked landscapes.”

FLORA FACTS

Scientific: *Viguiera stenoloba*

Common: Skeletonleaf Goldeneye

Family: Compositae

Heat-Loving Soft Shrub Attracts Butterflies

Viguiera stenoloba was blooming and radiant during December holidays. The plant deserves more attention from local landscapers.

In mid-December they were covered in bloom, especially those facing south. This amazing plant will look just as terrific in the cruelest summer heat, with just a bit of irrigation.

“*Viguiera stenoloba* doesn’t like even a little bit of shade,” says Mike Heep. “It needs to be right out there in the sun. If it just has morning sun, it won’t look very good.”

We get the idea: it thrives on plenty of sunlight.

This shrubby member of the Aster family has many descriptive names: Skeletonleaf Goldeneye, Goldeneye Daisy, Resinbush, Skeletonbush. One recognizes it by just the narrowest “skeleton” of a leaf, yellow flowers almost an inch wide and no thorns.

The blooms of skeletonbush are a nectar-magnet for butterflies. It has been used in butterfly gardens throughout the LRGV. Blooms appear on long stalks.

During dry times, the dried flower stalks remain. Gardeners recommend “dead-heading” by cutting back these dried parts. This encourages new growth which will be compact and rounded rather than leggy.

Skeletonbush edges many of the driest trails within Harlingen Thicket, where it blooms year-round when moisture is available. It is a typical component of Arroyo Colorado brush. As well as blooming during December, this plant seems to thrive during times when the heat is almost unbearable for humans.

Viguiera is dry-deciduous: during the driest times, the thin leaves are shed. New leaves sprout when water becomes available. Many plants native here are drought-tolerant. Though they show signs of stress, like wilting or shed leaves, they recover from this regular cycle year after year, season after season.

Dr. Vines (*Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of the Southwest*, 1960) reports the plant: “On rocky ground of the Pecos and Rio Grande river basins. ... In New Mexico in Dona Ana County. In Mexico in Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.” Correll and Johnston (*Manual of the Vascular Plants of Texas*, 1979) specify the South Texas range: “Locally abundant in dry desertic or subdesertic areas in the ... Rio Grande Plains.” The Native Plant Project (*Native Shrubs of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas*) describes this native habitat as “chaparral openings” and the preferred soil type as “loamy, well drained clay loams.”

Viguiera stenoloba is readily available from local native plant growers and nurseries.

Technical assistance by Mike Heep, native plant nurseryman and UTPA Instructor. Mrs. Mild holds an M.S. in Biol. Sci. She may be contacted at RioDeltaWild@aol.com.

