

Christina Mild  
**RIO DELTA WILD**

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**FLORA FACTS:**

Scientific Name: *Ziziphus obtusifolia*

Common Name: Lotebush, Clepe, Gumdrop Tree

Family: Rhamnaceae



**Gumdrop-Laden Foliage Conceals Thorns**

The dark fruit of Clepe feeds many birds during south Texas' April. During this fruit-laden season, gumdrop tree is an appropriate name.

The scientific name for this plant may be easy to remember. It has a nice sound and bears meaning. *Ziziphus obtusifolia* is that name. *Ziziphus* has a nice sound. *Obtusifolia* is descriptive. Obtuse: dull, not sharp, blunted. Clepe has prominent thorn-tipped branches. After rains, lustrous foliage conceals the thorns completely.

The shiny leaves soon bear evidence of insect-foraging. Bite marks appear. Entire leaves disappear.

Excellent photographs of *Ziziphus obtusifolia* are found in "A Field Guide to Common South Texas Shrubs," R. Taylor, J. Rutledge and J. Herrera, 1997. This book is an excellent help in learning native shrubs. Due to short stature, many of our trees are included also.

Taylor et. al. summarize wildlife use of clepe. White-tailed deer occasionally browse the leaves, as do cattle, sheep and goats. The fruit is eaten by chachalaca, gray fox, raccoon, coyote, and Christina Mild. The thorny bush gives cover and protection for quail. Even the picky cactus wren will sometimes nest in a lotebush.

One looks hard for distinctions to identify "near-desert" plants. Clepe has distinctive thorns. Each branch tip narrows to a hardened thorn tip. Striations adorn the bark in shades of grey and blue-green.

Stark angles of the barren thorny branches are strikingly beautiful against the sky and in contrast with surrounding foliage. One who learns to identify clepe by this barren thorniness is often confused by the leafiness which follows rain.



Lotebush is a seldom-abundant but common component of shrub communities and occurs in a variety of soil types and mixed-brush

communities." It is an appropriate plant choice for revegetation and landscaping throughout the valley, especially in dry places.

Amargoza and knife-leaf condalia are often confused with clepe because all have similar woody thorn-tips. Neither bears the bark striations of clepe. Both have tiny leaves like short evergreen needles. They retain them even through drought.

The gumdrops of clepe are round, blue-black and sweet, with one large seed. The fruit is similar in shape and color to coyotillo fruit, which causes paralysis. Coyotillo and clepe grow happily intertwined: good reason to remain alert while sampling.

On Good Friday, clepe was laden with gumdrops in Harlingen's Arroyo Park. A walk along the playing fields and paved trails there reveals a nice diversity of arroyo brush. Several kinds of

cacti grow beneath and shaded by the shrubs and trees. There is ample food for wildlife and concrete benches for people who may care to sit.

Many plants which grow there can be found on the webpages of the Native Plant Project: [www.nativeplantproject.org](http://www.nativeplantproject.org).

A map showing parks along Harlingen's Hike & Bike Trail can be downloaded from my webpage: [www.riodeltawild.com](http://www.riodeltawild.com).

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Mrs. Mild welcomes questions and comments.

Note striations in the bark of the stem in this very close-up photo of Ziziphus.

