

Crossvine, NICE! evergreen decoration for walls and fences

Bill Ward Boerne Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas

Operation NICE! (Natives Instead of Common Exotics!) landscape plant for April is crossvine (*Bigonia capreolata*). This vine is uncommon in the wild in the Hill Country, but I'm told it does just fine in Hill Country gardens. This is one Plant of the Month with which I've had no personal experience, save admiring its blooms in the Piney Woods when I mapped geology in East Texas long ago.

When crossvine was chosen by the NICE! committee, I went to a local nursery to see if I could buy a plant to learn more about it. I'm happy to say crossvine is available here, and the plants are blooming now. It is a handsome vine, and I'm looking forward to growing it in our yard.

In Texas, crossvine is evergreen. Its compound leaves are composed of two long, pointed leaflets 4-6 inches long. Clusters of showy yellow to red blooms come on during early spring to early summer. The bell-shaped flowers remind me of those of the trumpetvine (*Campis radicans*), which is a little more familiar as an old-fashioned garden vine. In fact, crossvine is in the catalpa or trumpet-creeper family, along with trumpetvine, esperanza or yellow bells (*Tecoma sans*), desert-willow

(*Chilopsis linearis*), and catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*).

Crossvine is common in moist woods all over the eastern US, the Gulf Coast, and East Texas. There are claims that it is found growing wild in northern Central Texas, and the "Atlas of Vascular Plants of Texas" shows isolated populations in Bandera County.

Jill Nokes ("How to Grow Native Plants of Texas and the Southwest") writes that crossvine may take a few years to become tolerant of limestone soils before showing rapid shoot growth. Our friends Judi and Tommy Martin, who live north of Boerne, say that the crossvines they planted on a rock wall and a fence in their yard are spreading, and the deer don't seem interested in browsing them.

Crossvine grows and blooms in full shade, partial shade, and full sun. The Boerne Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas provides free planting and care instructions for crossvine at nurseries participating in Operation NICE! (Hill Country African Violets and Nursery, Barkley's Nursery Center, and Maldonado Landscape and Nursery).

What's Blooming Early in Our Yard

To show some of the variety of natives and near-natives that can be

cultivated, I'll sometimes report what is blooming in our backyard plant zoo. The early bloomers this year are agarita, Mexican plum, redbud, Mexican buckeye, Texas madrone, creek plum, anemone, slender-stem bitterweed, puccoon, crow-poison, bluebonnet, blackfoot daisy, pink evening primrose, prairie verbena, and yellow columbine.

Rare Opportunity

Prominent botanists Bill Carr and Patty Leslie Pasztor will lead a series of five classes and field trips on Hill Country native plants April 9, 16, and 23 and May 7 and 14. This series will consider native-plant assemblages of the various local ecosystems. Classes will be held at the Cibolo Nature Center, and field trips will visit several different ecosystems, including riparian canyons, springs, pocket prairies, upland savannahs, sunny slopes, and shady slopes.

Contact the Cibolo Nature Center for details. Attendance will be limited. This is a rare opportunity to learn from the preeminent native-plant botanists of this area. Both of these people are not only smart, they are fun.