

## Texas Betony is NICE! All Summer Long

*Bill Ward Boerne Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas*

Operation NICE! plant for May is Texas betony (*Stachys coccinea*), which also might be called Texas tough. In my yard it survives dry periods, poor soil, deer browsing, and general neglect. At the moment, its scarlet-red blooms look good among the bluebonnets in our front yard.

This native of Trans Pecos Texas and farther west does well in Hill Country gardens and is a perfect candidate for NICE! (Natives Instead of the Common Exotics!) Plant of the Month. Texas betony requires little water after it is established, does not need fertilizer, has a long bloom period, and is deer resistant.

Texas betony is a member of the mint family, as its distinctly square stems suggest. Its elongate red flowers are similar to those of the locally native cedar sage (*Salvia roemeriana*), another member of the mint family. The deltoid leaves and erect to reclining branches of Texas betony remind me of our other local red salvia, tropical sage (*Salvia*

*coccinea*). This similarity with salvias is reflected in the common name “scarlet sage,” used for *Stachys coccinea* in some books.

Texas betony can grow one to three feet high, but it tends to sprawl.

It is used as a border plant in both sunny and shady gardens. Landscaper Dave Barrett says that Texas betony is one of his favorite plants for native gardens, because it grows well in this area, is not browsed by deer, and blooms from March to October. Rebecca Yoder found that Texas betony is an excellent pot plant.

Some people like to use Texas betony as a flowering ground cover, and it also is becoming a favorite for hummingbird and butterfly gardens.

Jill Nokes (“How to Grow Native Plants of Texas and the Southwest”) recommends Texas betony as companion plants for American beauty-berry and Indian currant.

A couple of years ago when we introduced Texas betony to our yard, the deer kept nibbling at the little

plants fresh from the nursery. The betony somehow managed to survive, and by the next spring the pungent odor of the leaves on the established plants apparently warded off any deer that came to browse.

The Boerne Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas provides free planting and care instructions for Texas betony at Boerne nurseries participating in Operation NICE!: Hill Country African Violets and Nursery, Barkley’s Nursery Center, and Maldonado Landscape and Nursery. Other nurseries participating in NICE!, through the cooperation of the Blanco County Master Gardeners, are Blanco Gardens in Blanco, The Old Lumber Yard in Johnson City, and The Planter Box in Marble Falls.

Writing about this versatile and long-flowering plant has reminded me that I need to get more Texas betony for our yard. Luckily, it usually is available at local nurseries.