

Winecups Are NICE! Spring Flowers

Bill Ward Boerne Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas

Operation NICE! (Natives Instead of the Common Exotics!) plant for April is an easy sell. Everyone seems to like the winecup (*Callirhoe* spp.). This Hill Country native is a favorite along highway rights-of-way and on wildflower trails, as well as in home gardens of this area.

The showy red-purple blossoms appear during mid-spring and into early summer. True to their name, from the side the flowers look like a goblet filled to the brim with red wine. The flowers are typical of the mallow family, with five wide petals surrounding a column of multiple yellow stamens. Leaves are deeply lobed with five to seven narrowly digitate segments.

The most common winecup species is *Callirhoe involucrata*, which is widespread all across Texas, except in the far-northeastern and the far-western parts of the state. This is the species commonly grown in gardens of our area. It is a sprawling plant, usually under a foot tall, with trailing stems up to 18 inches long. Its trumpet-like root tuber ensures it to be a drought-resistant and faithful

perennial. Some gardeners use this winecup as a groundcover. A variety of this species has pure white or white with purple-striped petals.

Two other species of winecup grow on the Edwards Plateau, *C. pedata* and *C. leiocarpa*, both of which are called standing winecup. These almost-identical species are erect plants, one to three feet tall. *C. pedata* has a thickened taproot and is a perennial. The other species is an annual.

Winecups tolerate a variety of soil types, but prefer soils that are well drained. They grow in dappled shade to full sun. The Boerne Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas provides free planting and care instructions for winecups at nurseries participating in Operation NICE! (Hill Country African Violets and Nursery, Barkley's Nursery Center, and Maldonado Landscape and Nursery).

A likely place to find winecups for sale this coming Saturday is at the Mostly Native Plant Sale, sponsored by the Cibolo Nature Center. The April 1 event will begin at 9 AM at the Kendall

County Fair Grounds. The Boerne Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas will offer a wide selection of natives that make attractive, drought-resistant landscape plants.

What's blooming this week in my backyard native-plant zoo:

Our backyard is sort of a zoo of native plants, largely introduced. In the interest of showing the continuously changing color that native-plant gardens provide, I will report once or twice a month which Hill Country natives are blooming in our backyard. Even though this has been an unusually dry spring, a few plants are blooming now.

White: Mexican plum, creek plum, madrone, aromatic sumac, and blackfoot daisy.

Red or pink: Mexican buckeye, redbud, *Salvia greggi*, red columbine, pink evening primrose, wild garlic, and one Indian blanket.

Yellow: slender-stem bitterweed.

Blue or purple: mountain laurel, prairie verbena, giant spiderwort, and a few bluebonnets.