

Yellow Jasmine, NICE! Vine for the Hill Country

Bill Ward Boerne Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas

Operation NICE! (Natives Instead of the Common Exotics!) plant for April is yellow jasmine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*), also known as Carolina jessamine. To tell the truth, when I first heard this choice for NICE! Plant of the Month, I was puzzled. My only up-close personal experience with yellow jasmine was many years ago when I used to admire its early-spring blooms as I tramped through East Texas forests mapping the geology of Angelina County. And didn't we see it growing high in the Louisiana piney woods and even in the brushy jungles of southeastern Mexico? Is yellow jasmine appropriate for Hill Country gardens?

Now that this vine was forced to my attention, I have noticed its profuse bright-yellow flowers decorating quite a few spots around Boerne this week. I asked several friends who have yellow jasmine (or Carolina jessamine) if they are pleased with it as a landscape plant for the Hill Country area. The answer was a resounding "yes."

My friend Rebecca Yoder says, "I love it! Mine is about 4 years old, and I have it on a cedar entrance to

my garden. It gets its flower buds super early (right now) and the whole thing comes alive with flowers en masse. New flowers must open in late afternoon/early evening, because the smell is incredibly strong that time of day. It's covered by bees and visited by the early-spring butterflies.

Yellow jasmine does well in my very heavy soil with almost no care.

It has not traveled like other vines (meaning it is not aggressive). My deer have not bothered it so far."

In her book "Native Texas Plants, Landscaping Region by Region", Sally Wasowski writes, "There are two big reasons why Carolina jessamine is our most popular native vine. It's evergreen, and it displays a cascade of yellow when it blooms." She implies that the vine can be grown even in far West Texas, although it may need extra water in that arid climate.

Judging from where yellow jasmine grows in the wild and in cultivation, it must be tolerant of soil type and drainage. In this area it also seems to be cold hearty. The shiny green leaves are one to three inches long and up to an inch wide. The one-and-a-half-inch-long yellow

blooms are funnel-shaped with five deep lobes at the opening. This vine can climb very high by twining.

So despite my skepticism, it seems that the yellow jasmine vine is drought tolerant in the Boerne area, grows well in our calcareous soils, and thrives in part shade to full sun.

It is evergreen, deer-resistant, and a faithful spring bloomer. That sounds like a good Plant of the Month to me.

Our garden will have one soon!

The Boerne Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas provides free planting and care instructions for yellow jasmine (Carolina jessamine) 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.