

The Weekly Plant

1 April 2012

Common names: desert globemallow (mallow, globe mallow, globe-mallow can be used interchangeably with globemallow), apricot mallow, desert hollyhock, sore-eye poppy, mal de ojo (evil eye), plantas muy malas, hierba muy mala (“very bad plants”)

Scientific name: *Sphaeralcea ambigua*¹

TAV location:

Widely scattered around TAV, including in some landscaped yards. The easiest place to see a wild plant is near the drive into the staff parking lot. Go toward the Villas, past the “staff parking” sign and past the large utility cover on the ground. Plant is to right of cover, slightly up the hill. Flowers close at night.

Discussion:

Desert globemallow is a perennial with a woody base, native to the desert southwest. New shoots grow each spring, producing a flush of flowers. Some plants will flower on and off for the rest of the season. Most plants have orange, 1-1.5” flowers but white, pink, peach, rose, and lavender are also seen. It grows to about 3’, mature plants are 2-3’ wide. This plant is available at garden centers. Give it full sun and occasional watering. If it becomes straggly, cut back to about 6” after flowering.

Desert globemallow is in the Malvaceae (mallow family) as are hollyhock, hibiscus, okra, and cotton. Once you learn the characteristics of this family, its members are easy to spot. Look at the flowers, leaves, and fruit.

Flowers have 5 sepals and 5 petals, not much help since this configuration is very common. The sexual parts are in an unusual arrangement – the numerous stamens are united to form central column around the pistil.

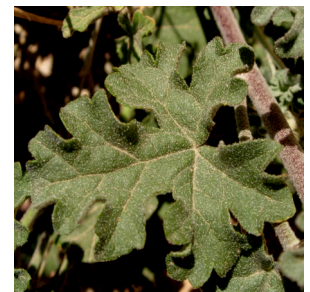
Leaves are usually lobed and palmately veined (this veining is not very common). The leaves of desert globemallow have 3 or 5 major lobes, each with a vein running down the center of the lobe. These veins meet at a single point at the base of the leaf (palmately veined).

Fruit is often, but not always, round and open on top, divided into many segments.

The leaves of desert mallow give this plant a bad reputation (plantas muy malas). They have stellate hairs that are easy to dislodge and are sometimes blown on the wind. They cause an allergic reaction in some people and are especially irritating to eyes. There are some uses for the plant. The Shoshoni of Nevada used the roots as an emetic, for stomach upset and birth control, and as a poultice for swollen feet.

¹ GRIN Online Database is the source of the currently accepted scientific name.

Photo and text by Mary Welch-Keeseey



Photos above:
form, flower, leaf, fruit

Photo to left:
stellate hairs of leaves
(several hairs radiating from
a central point – star-shaped)

