

The Weekly Plant

6 Sept 2015

Common and scientific names:

bahia, hairyseed bahia, hairy-seed false goldfields, silverleaf or sageleaf bahia - *Bahia absinthifolia*¹

desert marigold - *Baileya multiradiata*¹

In our Community: almost everywhere - see below

Discussion

I initially had trouble telling these two plants apart, so I decided to feature them together in Weekly Plant. They are also two of my favorite easy-to-grow, long-flowering native plants.

Thanks to the Magees and Holts, who volunteered their yards so you can take a long look at these plants. The Magees (lot 204) have mainly bahia; the Holts (lot 20, directly across the street) mainly desert marigold. You can stand at the curb and study one plant, then walk across the street and study the other.

Here's how to tell bahia and desert marigold apart:

Plant size and form: desert marigold is the taller of the two plants, with the flowers held well above the leaves, reaching to about 20 inches. It will look tall and narrow (lower photo, right). In a large planting, you can probably distinguish each plant. In contrast, bahia grows only about a foot high, with flowers held close to the leaves. It will look short and wide, with the stems tending to spread out rather than up (upper photo, right). In a large planting individual plants will grow together, creating a very nice groundcover.

Leaves: the leaves of each plant are about the same size - about 2" long and 1" wide. From a distance they give the plants a bluish-white appearance. Up close, desert marigold leaves are white with woolly hairs, bahia leaves are bluish with fewer hairs. Bahia leaves have a large central lobe with perhaps a small lobe to each side. Desert marigold leaves are narrow in the center with several lobes protruding at right angles.

Pay attention to how the leaves are arranged. The leaves of desert marigold are at the base of the plant with leafless flower stalks rising above them ("tall and narrow"). Bahia starts as a central stem with opposite leaves. The stem elongates and divides, growing outward and producing flowers (hence "short and wide").



Left: bahia leaf to left, desert marigold leaf to right
Below: bahia flower to left, desert marigold flower to right.



Flowers: both have 1" yellow daisy flowers that can appear spring through fall. Looking closely at the petals will help you tell the plants apart. Desert marigold flowers have several layers of overlapping petals, each with three lobes at the end. Bahia has a single layer of petals, each ending in three pointed, hardly visible lobes. Both bahia and desert marigold are native to the desert Southwest. They can survive without irrigation but will flower more profusely if watered during dry spells. Both are short-lived perennials, especially desert marigold, but regrow readily from seed. The flowers of both plants attract butterflies. You can neaten the look of the plants by cutting off faded flowers (and prevent reseeding), but don't be too fast about it. Our native [goldfinches](#) especially love bahia seeds. Additionally, desert marigold is the only food source for larvae of the [desert marigold moth](#). Don't be surprised if you find a tiny caterpillar in the flower.

The Magees' and the Holts' yards show how these native wildflowers can be used to create an attractive, informal garden, pleasing to both humans and wildlife.

¹ Currently accepted scientific name per [Flora of North America](#).