

# The Weekly Plant

## 9 March 2014

**Common names:** bladderpod mustard, Gordon's bladderpod

**Scientific name:** *Physaria gordonii* (formerly *Lesquerella gordonii*)<sup>1</sup>

### TAV location:

At the south end of the west side of Langtry, at the base of several irrigated trees. Don't confuse it with the yellow clover that is growing high around several trees further north on Langtry. Look for the flowers with 4 petals.

### Discussion:

This Week's Plant is a showy yellow annual that, in good years, can paint the desert yellow<sup>2</sup> (photo to right taken at San Andres National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico by US Fish and Wildlife Service). Its abundance will depend on rainfall, since new plants must germinate each year. With our erratic rains, I think we are having no more than an average year. This weekend I found it several places in Colossal Cave Park.

Found in Arizona, New Mexico, and the western parts of Oklahoma and Texas, bladderpod mustard is named for its spherical seed pods. It is a member of the Brassicaceae (mustard family). This is a very large family, with about 3800 species worldwide. Around 630 of those are native to North America north of Mexico; an additional 100 species native to the Old World have also found a home here, including vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, kale, radish, and arugula.

The unifying feature of mustards is the 4-petaled flower. This cross shape gave the family its old name of Cruciferae. Common names used for plants in this family include peppergrass or pepperweed (plants usually have very small flowers and spicy tasting leaves) and cress (plants with elongated leaves that are lobed around the edges). The fruit is a dried capsule, most often long and narrow, but sometimes shaped like a flattened coin or, like the fruit of this Week's Plant, a sphere.



Above: form. Right: flowers. Arrow points to style, which can also be seen on the fruit.

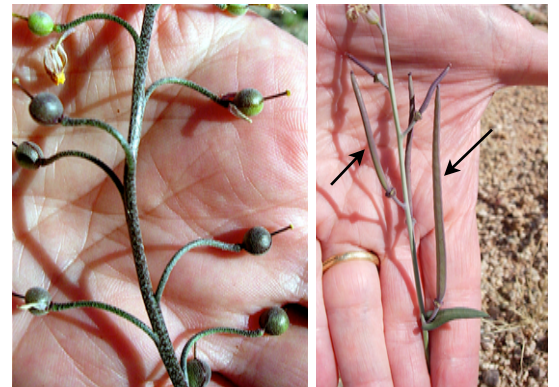
The leaves of bladderpod mustard form a small, ground-hugging rosette of elongated leaves. Each plant can put up several flower stalks that grow up to 16" high and are topped by bright yellow, 4-petaled flowers.



There is another bladderpod-type mustard you may see here in the Rincon Valley. *Physaria purpurea*, or purple bladderpod, is a white-flowered mustard that is blooming now. I spotted it at Colossal Cave Park this weekend. It is perennial, may have teeth on its leaves and is overall a bit larger than bladderpod mustard. The picture to right shows the white flowers as well as the bladderpod fruit and an older, fading flower turning purple, which gives rise to the common name.

<sup>1</sup> Tropicos is the source of the currently accepted scientific name: <http://www.tropicos.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> If the desert is golden, then the plant probably *Eschscholzia californica*, California or Mexican poppy.



Left: fruit of bladderpod mustard. Right: many mustard plants form long, narrow seed pods. This is the fruit of jewel flower, Weekly Plant from 11 Mar 2012.

There's not a lot more out there about this plant, no information on ethnobotanical uses for example. This plant is showy in mass and comes and goes quickly in early spring. It's an admirable addition to a naturalized yard, where its appearance each year can surprise and delight.

