

## The Weekly Plant

4 Nov 2012

**Common names:** turpentine bush, turpentine brush, larchleaf goldenweed, aguirre

**Scientific name:** *Ericameria laricifolia* (formerly *Aplopappus laricifolius* and *Haplopappus laricifolius*)<sup>1</sup>

**TAV location:**

I have found only one plant (thanks to Betty Feinberg). It is on the front slope of lot 72 (Galileo Lane), less than 10 feet from the road, partially hidden by several trees.

**Discussion:**

If you enjoy chrysanthemums in autumn, you may well like this plant. Turpentine bush flowers in mid-to-late fall and has a rounded, mounding habit that reminds me of mums. There the resemblance ends. Turpentine bush is in the Aster family (Asteraceae), as are mums, but it has only yellow flowers (yes, it is another DYC). The leaves are small, long, and narrow, up to 3/4" long. Their dark green color is quite noticeable against our light-colored soils and often-gray plants.

Turpentine bush is native to the desert Southwest and to the Santa Catalina and Rincon Mountains<sup>2</sup>. It is an evergreen, woody shrub that may eventually grow to 3-4 feet x 3-4 feet. Add in drought tolerance and heat and cold tolerance (it is usually found at 3,000 to 7,000 foot elevation), and turpentine bush becomes a great candidate for a low water use landscape. It is also a good wildlife plant, providing nectar late in the fall for butterflies and other insects.

I'm struggling over the common name of "turpentine bush". Crush as I might, I've not been able to elicit a fragrance from the leaves, especially not one that reminds me of turpentine. The scent (non-scent?) is a result of glands on the leaf surface. Several of the previous Weekly Plants, most recently *Heterotheca subaxillaris* on 16Sept, also have glands (see photo).



Instead of protruding from the leaf or stem, as seen in *Heterotheca*, the glands of turpentine bush are round, sunken pits on leaves. A gland is a structure that secretes one or more substances. But why would a plant secrete anything? One commonly accepted theory is that the substances protect the plant from enemies. The substances may be sticky to trap and immobilize small insects. They may be toxic to weaken, if not kill, feeding insects. Sometimes they might just make the plant unpalatable<sup>3</sup>. Of course, some glands secrete sweet nectar. The insects return the favor by pollinating the flowers.

Left: sunken glands of turpentine bush.  
Right: the glands of *Heterotheca subaxillaris* (camphorweed) are very different in shape.

Photos and text by Mary Welch-Keesey

<sup>1</sup> Flora of North America (<http://floranorthamerica.org/families>) is the source of the currently accepted scientific name.

<sup>2</sup> Checklist for Saguaro National Park - Rincon Mountain District (<http://swbiodiversity.org/seinet/checklists/checklist.php?cl=2537>)

<sup>3</sup> Function and Chemistry of Plant Trichomes and Glands in Insect Resistance, Robert D. Stipanovic, in *Plant Resistance to Insects*, ACS Symposium Series, Vol. 208.