

The Weekly Plant

15 July 2012

Common names: gray thorn, lotebush, southwestern condalia,
Scientific name: *Ziziphus obtusifolia* (formerly *Condalia lycioides*)¹

TAV location:

Along the trails: at the north end of the red trail, on the slopes, but not in the wash or along the flat open area at the south end of the trail. Not common.

Discussion:

The recent rain brought gray thorn into full bloom. Well, that may be a bit of an exaggeration. The plants behind my house, in loose sand but without irrigation, are blooming abundantly. Since the flowers are tiny, the plant looks about the same as it does without flowers. The plants on the red trail have just a few flowers so far.

Gray thorn is a small shrub, usually less than 8 feet in height. The side branches all end in a sharp thorns that are hard to avoid and make photo-taking difficult. It might be useful as a barrier plant to keep wandering beasts, human or other, away. Birds find it useful protection for nestlings.

Gray is the predominant theme with this plant. The small, blunt-ended (obtuse) leaves are covered with fine hairs and are gray-green. The thorns are a pale, almost white gray. The older stems are a silvery gray. Even the flower buds are covered with small (yes, gray) hairs.

The tiny flowers occur in clusters. The showy part of the open flower (if there is one) is the sepals. Small, round blue-black fruit will soon follow. These are eaten by small animals, especially white-winged doves and Gambel's quail.² Native Southwestern peoples, such as the Akimel O'odham (Pima), Tohono O'odham (Papago), Mohave, and Maricopa, also enjoy the fruit of this shrub.³



Top: plant form. Bottom: Each of the side branches is tipped with a sharp point.



Left: Gray-green, obtuse leaves, gray stems. Center: Two buds (with gray hairs) and a developing fruit (rimmed in red). Right: Flower. True size is about 1/8 inch.

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

² *A Field Guide to the Plants of Arizona*, Anne Orthe Epple, 1995.

³ Native American Ethnobotany Dabase (<http://herb.umd.umich.edu/>)