

## The Weekly Plant

5 Aug 2012

**Common names:** rough menodora, yellow menodora, twinberry, rough desert olive

**Scientific name:** *Menodora scabra*<sup>1</sup>

**TAV location:**

Next to fireplug across from lot 164 on Galileo. Also many along south end of red trail as it goes along the ridge.

**Discussion:**

*Scabra* means rough, which gives rise to some of this plant's common names. The stems are indeed slightly rough.

Rough menodora is a perennial subshrub that can grow to 2.5 ft. In our open spaces, most plants are closer to a foot in height. "Subshrub" is an ill-defined word. Sometimes it means a small shrub. In this case it means an herbaceous plant (one which dies to the ground during the dormant period) that becomes woody at the base and thus never dies quite all the way to the ground. However, it never becomes a true woody shrub, the upper branches never become woody.

Rough menodora is in the olive family (Oleacea), as are olive, ash, lilac, and forsythia. The genus *Menodora* is one of the few, perhaps the only, herbaceous member of this family. A feature of this family, fairly rare in the plant world, is sexual parts that come in two's. There are two stamens (male parts), and the ovary (female part) has two parts. The number of sepals and petals varies within the family, sometimes within the species. Rough menodora has 5 (sometimes 4 or 6) yellow petals which spread out flat to about  $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Below the petals are 8-11 long, slender sepals. The flowers open in the evening and fade the next morning (today they were mostly gone by 11:30 AM after a warm night followed by a partly-cloudy morning). This year, there were flowers in April and again now after just a few monsoon rains

After the flowers fade, the ovary enlarges to form two reddish, translucent berries. At maturity, the tops of the fruit will split off to release seed.

The leaves of rough menodora are small and oval with almost no leaf stalk (petiole). They have a characteristic that all plant IDers wish was more rare. The leaves low on the stem are opposite (two leaves at the same position on the stem). The leaves on the upper part of the stem are alternate (only one leaf at any position on the stem). Knowing the leaf arrangement is important for plant identification, one of the first characteristics a plant professional will check. It is very easy to misidentify when the plant has both opposite and alternate leaves!



*Top: Rough menodora flower showing 5 petals and 2 stamens. Bottom left: Petals, stamens and style removed, showing several remaining sepals and the two-lobed ovary. Bottom right: Developing fruit, a "twin berry". The top half will split off at maturity.*

<sup>1</sup> GRIN Online Database is the source of the currently accepted scientific name.