

The Weekly Plant

13 Sept 2015

Common names: Apache plume, feather rose, feather duster bush, ponil

Scientific name: *Fallugia paradoxa*¹

In our Community: northwest corner of lot 192 (Sanders/Nelson) right along the road

Discussion

Apache plume is a showy, drought-tolerant shrub native to all four American deserts. One-to-two inch white flowers appear in spring and then sporadically until fall, especially if the plant receives summer rains or a bit of irrigation. The seeds are just as showy as the flowers. Each seed has a long, feathery, pink plume. Group 40 or so together in a seed head and they make quite a show.



Though Apache plume can be found in Pima County, it is typically found at elevations higher than the Village - 3,500-8,000 feet. It does grow well in the Village and can be used as a landscape plant. Several of us on Galileo grow it successfully and in some yards it reseeds vigorously. I received my plants as seed in a delivery of gravel mulch. The seeds germinated without irrigation (though near a downspout) and have been transplanted successfully to a small hillside. There they will appreciate the good drainage and help stabilize the soil against erosion. Though my plants are less than a foot tall, they have already produced a few flowers!

I have seen Apache plume growing naturally at both Chiricahua National Monument (at 5,000 ft) and on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon (about 6,800 ft elevation). At the higher elevations it may grow together with cliff rose (*Purshia stansburiana*²), a close relative. You may even, as I did, have trouble telling them apart. Here are some things to look for:



-Apache plume is a shrub, 6' high and not quite as wide. Cliff rose is more tree-form and can grow to 25'.

-Apache plume flowers are 1-2" wide and pure white. Cliff rose flowers are about 1/2" wide, cream to yellow.

-Cliff rose never has more than 10 white plummy seeds per seed head; Apache plume typically has 20-40 seeds with pink plumes.



-Both plants have small, dark, evergreen leaves with several lobes. The leaves of cliff rose have small glands, especially visible if you hold the leaf to the light. Apache plume leaves have no glands and short, dense, yellow or rust-colored hairs on the underside of the leaf.

Both Apache plume and cliff rose were used by native peoples. Apache plume's strong, straight stems were used for arrows. The stems might also

be bound together and used as brooms. The softened bark of cliff rose was used as bedding in cradleboards and to line shoes for warmth.



Top right: Apache plume in a landscape planting at Grand Canyon, south rim.

Bottom right: tree-form of cliff rose (Grand Canyon)

Upper left-top: Apache plume flower.

-middle: pink, plummy seeds of Apache plume.

-bottom: white, plummy seeds of cliff rose.

Bottom left: rust-colored hairs on back of Apache plume leaf and glands on cliff rose leaf. See arrows.

¹ [Tropicos](#) is the source of the currently accepted scientific name.

² Sometimes the spelling *stansburyana* is used. You may also see it listed as *Purshia mexicana* var. *stansburiana*.