

The Weekly Plant

23 Sept 2012

Common names: burroweed, shrine jimmyweed, burrow goldenweed

Scientific name: *Isocoma tenuisecta*¹

TAV location:

Just about everywhere except manicured landscapes. Many plants in open areas along Carver and Elliot. Several plants opposite lots 121-132 on Langtry.

Discussion:

Two weeks ago The Weekly Plant was burro-bush, but that plant isn't a bush. Some people will think of it as an annual weed, with soft herbaceous stems. This week we have burroweed, which is actually a small "bush" that gets larger every year (at this point you'll find horticulturists muttering under their breath: "I hate common names. I hate common names.>").

Indeed, several plants are given the name burroweed or burrobush. The implication is that only burros will eat them. Unfortunately, this isn't true for burroweed. It is eaten by livestock and they can be poisoned by it, especially horses. Symptoms include "trembles" (which gives rise to the common name of jimmyweed) and milk sickness - humans can become ill after drinking milk of affected cows.

Burroweed is an early colonizer of old farm fields and is often found in vacant lots, parking lots, and along roadsides. In its favor, it does provide cover for small animals, stabilize the soil, and serve as a nectar source for many small insects. It is native to southern Arizona and northern Mexico, possibly also to New Mexico.

Burroweed is a shrub, a small woody plant. "Woody" implies that the trunk and stems grow thicker each year. The alternate leaves are very slender, with several short lobes that grow out at right angles. They are rough to the touch but not sharp. The leaves somewhat resemble those of tumbleweed. To tell the difference: grab some leaves with your hand. Burroweed doesn't hurt; tumbleweed does.

Burroweed, like the last two Weekly Plants, is also a DYC. Unlike the last two plants, it has disk flowers but no ray flowers (ray flowers have large showy petals). This plant will trick you because each flower is large and almost looks like a showy ray flower. Instead, the 5 petals are fused into a long slender tube. The sepals are reduced to bristles and are quite visible among the yellow petals. These bristles stay attached to the seed and aid in dispersal.

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



Top: plant form. Middle: inside of plant showing woody stem and branches. Bottom: leaf.

Photos and text by Mary Welch-Keesey



Left: several flower heads and bee. Note long tube (the petals) of each flower. Sexual parts (anthers and stigma) project out of the tube of some. The sepals have become bristles. Right: the bristles stay attached to the seed and aid in dispersal. These seeds are covered with long silky hairs.