

The Weekly Plant

25 Oct 2015

Common names: blackfoot daisy, desert daisy, plains blackfoot, ash-gray blackfoot

Scientific name: *Melampodium leucanthum*¹

In our Community: south end of Langtry, Old Spanish Trail side of road, just before you get to the fence.

Discussion

I noticed this plant as one of the early flowers of spring. I noticed this plant during monsoon. Now in late October, it's still in flower, a lovely mound of green foliage covered in white daisies.

Blackfoot daisy is native to New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, and northern Mexico. It is native to Arizona and to Pima County, including the Rincon Valley and Mountains, below 5,000 feet or so. It's a tough plant, able to stand desert heat in full sun and mountain cold in winter (to 0° F). It's drought tolerant, growing in rocky, well-drained soils.

If you are looking for a small landscape plant, it's hard to go wrong with blackfoot daisy. It has a long bloom period - March to October or later. It will take full sun but also a bit of shade. It needs only minimal care. You can trim it back in late winter after 2 or 3 years to keep it tidy, but that's all it needs. Faded flowers seem to disappear, so there is no need to deadhead (remove faded flowers) to keep it attractive. It is listed as a butterfly plant. However, I've not seen butterflies on our plants, not even a bee.



And the negatives - there have to be negatives, right: blackfoot daisy is short-lived, only 4 or 5 years. It does reseed, so keep a lookout around the base of the plant for seedlings you can nurture as replacements. More important, however, is that it really does prefer dry soil. Overwater this plant by putting it on your drip irrigation system, and you will probably lose it. Water it only 2 or 3 times a month in summer, not at all in winter. If we receive regular summer rains, it may not even need that.

Blackfoot daisy is fairly easy to identify. Each flower head is held singly and is about 1 inch across. The petals are white with two lobes. On the back of each petals there are veins, often purplish or reddish, that converge toward each tip. The leaves are opposite, green and narrow, about 2 inches long. The plant is no more than 12 inches high but can spread to almost 2 feet.



The blackfoot portion of the name comes from the shape of the seeds, thought to look like feet by some folks (I can't see it!).² Picture of some seeds to right - if you find the feet, please let me know!



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

² The scientific name "Melampodium" means black foot. Though some claim the name refers to the seeds, others say it derives from *Melampus*, a soothsayer of renown in Greek mythology. (ref: [FNA](#))

Top left: Blackfoot daisy flower. Note two lobes on each petal.

Bottom left: Veins on the back of each petal converge toward the two lobes.

Right: Several seeds from blackfoot daisy. Do you see any black feet here?

Photos and text by Mary Welch-Keeseey