

## The Weekly Plant

### 9 Sept 2012

**Common names:** Trans-Pecos thimblehead, burro-bush

**Scientific name:** *Hymenothrix wislizeni*<sup>1</sup>

**TAV location:**

Along the roads, Galileo from Lot 173 south for the next several vacant lots and Langtry across from lots 136-144. Also along Carver in front of lots 235 and 236.

**Discussion:**

If you drive from the Village, past the Rincon Store and Farmer's Market, you will see a field of yellow on the right side of the road. These are the flowers of a 3 foot tall plant, swaying with the wind. Indeed, this plant is quite common all along Old Spanish Trail near the Village.

If you take a closer look, you may see insects feeding on the flowers. If you're lucky you may startle a small flock of bright yellow birds happily picking out seeds even before they mature. These lesser goldfinches, along with house finches and other seed-eating birds, eagerly seek out this plant.

The yellow flowers belong to Trans-Pecos thimblehead, an annual that begins flowering in late summer. Each thimblehead is made of several small flowers. A few of the flowers have large, showy petals that end in three shallow lobes. The flowers in the center of the head do not have showy petals. Overall, the head is small but because many are clustered together, the overall effect is showy. The seeds, one for each tiny flower, are black with many bristles attached to one end. Both flowers and seeds are very popular with our native wildlife.

This plant belongs to a beloved group known as NYCs. When you have just successfully identified one, that stands for Darn Yellow Composites. It stands for other things when you've just looked through all your references and found you can't distinguish one from another. All NYCs are in the Aster family (Asteraceae). This was previously the Composite family, so-called because each head is a composite of many small flowers.

The characteristics that help with ID include the presence, absence, and shape of the showy petals; the outside of the flower head; and the leaves. For this plant, the leaves were the key ID characteristic. They are highly dissected, with many separate fingers.

Look as I might, I couldn't find a picture of this plant in any of my books. There were many NYCs but none had the right leaf shape. I finally found Trans-Pecos thimblehead on the Southeastern Arizona Wildflowers website<sup>2</sup>, with confirmation in *Baboquivari Mountain Plants*<sup>3</sup> and a neighbor's wildflower book<sup>4</sup>. Fortunately, the lesser goldfinch never have this problem!



*Plant form. Note leaves mainly low on plant. Height ranges from 2-5 feet.*



*Left: flower heads, some individual flowers have showy petals ending in 3 lobes. Right: seed with bristles, size compared to pencil lead.*



*This leaf is highly dissected.*

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

<sup>2</sup> see <http://www.fireflyforest.com/flowers/>

<sup>3</sup> see <http://tinyurl.com/Baboquivari> <sup>4</sup> see <http://tinyurl.com/9uga5mt>