

Weekly Plant Photo Edition 2 May 2020

Common Names: safflower, false saffron, bastard saffron, dyer's saffron, saffron thistle
Scientific name: *Carthamus tinctorius* (*Carthamus* from Arabic word meaning "to paint"; *tinctorius* meaning used as a dye)

TAV location, 2020: On Galileo, at curb's edge, about the middle of lot 24.

Safflower is an annual, native to the eastern Mediterranean and west Asia. It has been cultivated since ancient times as an oil crop. Additionally, the flower petals were used to make both yellow and red dyes and as an inexpensive alternative to true saffron. The plant was also used medicinally.

In the United States, safflower is cultivated in the dry western states as an oil crop. A small percentage of the crop is sold as bird seed, which is probably the origin of our plants.



Above left: Safflower initially grows as a single stem (12-36"). As it reaches flowering, the stem branches and terminal flowers are produced. The lower leaves die, transferring their nutrients and water to the developing flowers and seeds.

Above right: The flower head is a cluster of several 5-petaled flowers. The bracts (modified leaves) under the flower head are spiny, possibly reminding you of thistle.

Right: The flowers can range from yellow to red and usually darken/redden as they mature.

