

On the Wild Side – February, 2010
By Donna Thomas, Oasis Garden Club of IWV

Cordia parvifolia – Littleleaf Cordia

Littleleaf Cordia is an evergreen shrub that grows four to six feet tall and four to eight feet wide. It is a Southwest native that occurs in the northwestern and north-central part of Mexico and in the central part of Baja, California. It is found along washes, arroyos, alluvial flats and rocky plains from the 100 to 2,300 foot elevations. It is a member of the Boraginaceae Family (Borage or Forget-me-not Family) – plants that are known and grown for their showy flowers. It is a tough species for dry locations and is tolerant of alkaline soils. It shows excellent heat tolerance and is prized for its ease of growth and maintenance. The Cordia is a multi-branched shrub with a stiff branching pattern. The bark is smooth and gray with pale gray patches. The small gray green leaves are one inch long and one-half inch wide, ovate to round in shape with serrate or toothed margins and showing conspicuous veins. One and a half inch wide snowy white flowers appear in three to four inch clusters with four to six bell shaped flowers in each cluster. It is rare to find a desert plant that has white flowers. It blooms sporadically from February to November after a rain or after irrigation. The fruit is a tiny drupe that is found deep within the drying calyx.

Littleleaf Cordia is drought tolerant once established. Applying water twice a month is sufficient and irrigating in summer will extend its blooming period. It will grow in most soil types but prefers well drained soils. It likes full sun and will tolerate reflected heat even from a west facing wall. It is cold hardy to 18 degrees Fahrenheit. The Littleleaf Cordia is often planted along desert roadways in Arizona. It makes a nice hedge when plants are massed or spaced eight or nine feet apart for an informal hedge. It is a good plant for use in patio areas and can be planted singly as an accent plant. The white flowers provide a visual cooling effect in hot weather and accentuate the colors of other desert flowers. It grows moderately slowly and requires minimal pruning in colder regions to prune out any frost damaged branches. Rabbits will eat young plants, but do not bother established plants. This plant can be purchased from Mountain States Wholesale nursery. You can find the plant in Ridgecrest planted on the west side of the Rite Aid pharmacy between the parking lot and the sidewalk along Balsam Street. I have not yet experimented to see if cuttings or seeds from my plant will produce plants for our Oasis Plant Sales, but I will try some.

Facts for this article were obtained from the following sources:

Cool Plants for Hot Gardens – Greg Starr

Mountain States Wholesale nursery website

Native Plants for Southwestern Landscapes – Judy Mielke

Sunset Western Garden Book

Trees and Shrubs for the Southwest – Mary Irish