



Christina Mild
RIO DELTA WILD

FLORA FACTS

Scientific Name:

Cordia boissieri

Common Names: Anacahuíta,
Mexican Olive, Wild Olive

Family: Boraginaceae

**Anacahuíta is State Flower of
Nuevo Leon**

In the United States,
Anacahuíta occurs in the wild
in few places. Historically, this
beautiful bloomer grew no
further north than Jim Hogg,
Hidalgo and Willacy counties in

Texas. It is native to no other state in the U.S. The national champion, 25 x 33 feet, grows in
Texas. Trees may live as long as 120 years.

Mexican Olive is also native to Coahuila, Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon and San Luis Potosi. The
citizens of Nuevo Leon honor the pretty tree as their state flower.

The yellow-throated, tubular white flowers attract hummingbirds, who ardently claim a tree
as theirs alone. Stop long enough to admire *Anacahuíta* and you may well observe hummers
zipping around in defense of territory. Who says that hummers are only attracted to red
blossoms?

Butterflies are also fond of nectaring at the blossom clusters. Many have their portraits
taken in the act of drinking from the yellow throats of these two-inch trumpets.

Many nursery and landscape websites list *Cordia boissieri* for sale, in such states as
California, Nevada, Arizona and Florida. One also finds scientific papers on how the seeds can
best be germinated. This is one South Texas native which has found widespread popularity in
warm places.

The plant is drought-tolerant and frost-resistant, tolerating temperatures in the high 20's. In
a severe frost, Wild Olive will lose its leaves.

Mike Heep remembers seeing many more wild specimens of Mexican Olive in his youth.
Heep and other LRGV natives recount many scenes of wild specimens of native plants removed
for planting in yards and other landscapes.

Mexican Olive is widely available in nurseries today, so digging a wild specimen can hardly
be justified. In addition, anyone who desires to grow this plant from seed can collect bushels of
wild "olives" from parking lots and downtown sidewalks throughout the valley.

Anacahuíta is the favored treat of a very pretty golden beetle, typically found on the leaf's
underside. This beetle, as cute as a jewel, transforms an attractive tree into one of unhealthy
appearance. The infestation is self-limiting. New leaves will sprout and the tree will, once again,

have beautiful foliage. Frank Gonzales, a local landscaper, points out that spraying insecticide on the upper surface of leaves has minimal effect on this underside-dwelling pest.

We should also point out that butterflies alighting for nectar would be harmed by insecticide spray, a good reason to allow nature to follow her course.

The shape of the yellowish fruit lends this tree the common names of Texas Olive, Wild Olive and Mexican Olive. It is not closely related to other types of olives, but is a member of the Borage Family. Close relatives include other butterfly favorites, the Turnsoles, species *Heliotropium*. *Anacua*, a highly-attractive native tree, is also closely related.

Both *Anacahuitta* and *Anacua* have large leaves in comparison to other valley natives. Those of *Anacahuitta* are soft and grey-green. *Anacua*'s leaves are sandpaper-rough, smaller and darker green.

The fruits of *Anacahuitta* are edible, though less than tasty. Some sources caution eating the fruits in quantity.

In Mexico, leaves are used in medicinal teas to treat rheumatism and bronchial congestion. I find this a soothing remedy for the misery associated with a cold.

Wild Olive is useful to wild animals in many ways. The fruits are consumed by wild mammals, birds and domestic cattle. The leaves are also consumed as forage.

When planted near a sidewalk or driveway, *Anacahuitta* will require vigorous pruning to become a single-trunk erect specimen. *Landscaping for the Lazy* would recommend giving this beautiful tree ample space to assume a beautifully-spreading shape. The shade beneath is perfect for Pigeonberry or Tropical Sage.

Anacahuitta does best in well-drained places. Transplants will require watering until established.

None of the plants I've studied will bloom everyday throughout the year. *Anacahuitta* is almost an exception, though many specimens in Harlingen have taken a break from prolific blooms just now.

You might even think of this pretty plant as a substitute for snow. After a windy day or a strong shower, the ground beneath it is often covered in fallen white blooms.

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