

## Interesting Native Trees for the San Antonio Landscape

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It is an ideal time to plant trees in San Antonio landscapes. Here are some smaller native trees to consider.

I cannot help but think that Mexican olive, *Cordia boissieri*, is a plant that will fare well in any temperature increase that occurs because of global warming in San Antonio and South Texas. It seems to be on the edge of its cold tolerance geography and has been especially showy over the last few years. Instead of the specimen at the Alamo freezing back every 4 or 5 years maybe it will make a show by having a longer bloom period and growing to 25 feet tall like some of those in our neighborhoods.

Even if it is my imagination that Mexican olive is benefitting by a reduced freeze threat, the plant is worth while to grow in your landscape. The white blooms resemble hibiscus and are showy in the spring and the fall. Pollinators value the blooms as a nectar source including our 3 fall migrating hummingbird species. A gumball sized fruit follows the blooms and is eaten by some bird and wildlife species. Mexican olive seems to want to be evergreen in San Antonio but most winters it reacts to any cold weather by losing most or all its leaves. When there is a serious cold front the species will freeze back to the roots.

Mexican olive is not easy to reproduce but it appears to become easier to find as our winter temperatures (real or imagined) moderate. Keep an eye out at your favorite nursery and at native plant sales for container grown stock.

Anaqua is a relatively slow growing native tree that eventually makes a desirable 40-foot shade tree. Despite its slow growth rate, it fits the mold of a traditional shade tree enough to be listed on the CPS shade tree program as an acceptable choice worthy of a rebate. Among its other characteristics, anaqua is a dense evergreen tree that produces attractive white blooms in the spring followed by yellow berries. The berries are favorites of the birds but not necessarily of all gardeners and for sure not shopkeepers in the La Villita because they are produced in overwhelming numbers and are "sticky". While the anaquas in the landscape are alive with motion within the foliage as large numbers of bird species and individuals feed on the berries, shopkeepers in La Villita are likely to be trying to sweep up the sticky berries being tracked into the shops by their customers. Anaqua is evergreen in the same way that live oak is, there is a fast leaf drop and leaf return in the spring that most observers do not notice. The foliage is dark green and dense with a rough surface that results in anaqua's alternate name, sandpaper tree. In addition to the mixed reaction to the berries, anaquas will spread by seed and form thickets that the birds' value but do not fit every landscape situation. Container grown anaquas are available at most area nurseries.

The Mexican and Texas varieties of redbud will also grow to 40 feet tall on some sites. Its bloom period is in February when its showy pink bloom period is recognized as an introduction to the year's growing season. The blooms period last for about 3 weeks before the blooms fade, and the tree becomes inconspicuous again into the edge of the shade border under the taller shade trees.

Eastern redbud is available at area nurseries along with the Mexican and Texas varieties, but they fare better in our frequent droughts than the Eastern variety.

Mexican plum blooms about the same time as redbud and in fact they are attractive when grown together as part of the understory planting. The Mexican plum usually grows to about 15 feet tall with white fragrant flowers and late ripening fruit that is consumed by the birds and other wildlife in the late fall. They make an attractive specimen plant when grown singly or in groups of 3 or 5. The crown is compact and serves as good nesting habitat and cover in addition to a food plant for the birds. Mexican plum is available at most area nurseries for planting in the fall or spring.

Texas persimmon grows to 30 feet tall. It is deciduous in the San Antonio area with distinctive patterned bark. The crown is not as dense as the Mexican plum so it does not provide as much cover for the birds but with the showy bark and the small fragrant blooms it is worthwhile to grow. The female plants produce a large crop of fruit which is a favorite of the birds. Seedlings can sometimes be found for sale at native plant sales.