

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham

“Pin Clover: An Early Blooming Wildflower”

The Geranium family (Geraniaceae) includes two wildflowers that are early, colorful, spring bloomers. The word, “Geranium” is derived from *geranos*, meaning “crane”. Members of this family have a bird bill-like, long-beaked pistil that is separated into segments containing the fruit (seed) of the plant. The two members that are common in our area, Pin Clover and Stork’s bill, are easily identified by the pin-like or beak-like seed pod and the pink or rose flowers.

Pin Clover has covered our back yard in a carpet of pink beginning in late January and will continue to bloom through April or perhaps even May. This native of the Mediterranean area is one of our earliest bloomers. It is now widely naturalized in North America and is welcome on ranges as a forage plant. Pin Clover has horizontally spreading stems, up to 20 inches long, slightly soft and hairy. Compound leaves are up to 4 inches long and are divided into segments. The tiny rose-pink flowers are very fragile and fall off after a day’s bloom. New flowers open the next morning adding a haze of pink to cover the fields, roadsides, and yards of those who welcome the lovely sight. The seedpods form while the plant is still blooming. The pods look like long pins and give the plant its name. After it dries, the twisting seedpod is spiraled into the ground.

Another member of the Geranium family, Stork’s bill, appears in our backyard in late February through April. The horizontal gray, hairy stems of this low-growing plants are 15 inches long or more. Leaves are opposite, ½-2 inches long, with 3-5 lobes, rounded and fine-toothed. The purple flowers bloom in clusters of 2 and 3 and have 5 petals nearly 1 inch long. Unlike the Pin Clover, the Stork’s Bill flowers are sensitive to light. They open late in the day and close in the morning. The long-beaked seedpods that appear after the flower fades and falls resemble a stork’s bill. Each style is attached to a seed. The styles twist like a corkscrew to help the seeds separate and disperse.

Author’s Note: Our yard area covers several acres. We choose to mow “weeds: rather than invest in planting turf grass and providing the necessary water to keep it healthy. Therefore our yard is filed with wildflowers during the late winter, spring and fall. We do mow between the peak bloom periods, after the flowers have thrown their seeds, always being careful to mow around members of the Milkweed Family so necessary for the Monarch butterflies.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

