

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER  
Tip of the Week

by Beverly Wickersham

Desert Willow: A Delightful Tree

The scientific name of the Desert Willow is *Chilopsis linearis*. The Greek *chil* means "lip" and *opsi* means "appearance." In other words, the flower shape resembles lips. *Linearis* is a reference to the tree's narrow pale green willow-like leaves that are often sticky. Additional common names are Flowering Willow and Mimbre, a Spanish name meaning "wicker." The branches of the tree have been used to make baskets. Desert Willow is a member of the Catalpa (*Bignoniaceae*) family with the characteristic tubular flowers and long narrow fruits. The popular flowering plant Tacoma Stans is also in this family with the similar fruit and flower.

This small tree may grow up to 35 feet. It has a cooked trunk and a spreading crown. Its showy, tubular orchid-like flowers are usually lavender. However, white and burgundy forms are often found on these trees. It blooms continuously from June to October and is a favorite stop for the hummingbird family as well as bees that are attracted to the purple stripes of the flower tube. Even in winter, the architectural shape is pleasing to the eye: very airy and scuptral.

Desert Willow is very adaptable. In the Trans-Pecos area it is usually found along streams and arroyos. However, it has naturalized in the Llano Uplift area and will grow under a variety of soil and moisture conditions. This tree can adapt to sand, loam, clay, and even caliche. This is good news for gardeners in Central Texas who are never absolutely certain what lies a few feet beneath the chosen planting site.

Our three Desert Willow trees are grouped in a circle in our front yard, and are a delight throughout the warm days of spring through fall. They also have a pleasing light scent for those who enjoy the smells of the summer!

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact [ask.bcmga@gmail.com](mailto:ask.bcmga@gmail.com)

