



Texas Tuberose can grow to be more than 5 feet tall

Gardeners' Dirt by Norma Friedrich, Victoria County Master Gardener Intern

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This native plant came to my attention during training with the Rio Grande Valley Chapter Texas Master Naturalists. The National Butterfly Center in Mission asked for our help in surveying local nature parks and any ranches or private property that would allow entry.

The concern that prompted the survey was the decline of the Manfrega Giant Skipper butterfly. The decline is attributed to habitat loss of the host plant Manfrega (*Manfrega maculosa*) also known as Texas Tuberose. This situation is common with much flora and fauna as Texas loses more and more native habitat.

The Manfrega is a stunning plant both in foliage and flower with a rosette of fleshy, narrow 1-foot-long, soft sword-shaped dull-green leaves. It looks like an agave with its spiky radiating leaves. They are heavily

marked with round reddish-purple to brown spots and have yellowish flowers. It can also have lighter spots on the leaves with blooms that are greenish to brown.

Both are *Manfreda variegata* as the stamens extend outside the corolla tube 1-1/8 inches or more pointing outward not upward. The flowers bloom in a fragrant spike at the end of a long stalk in early summer.

This spring I documented the growth of the flower stalk from a potted Texas Tuberose. One plant produces one stalk, and it grows very fast. The stalk of my plant grew to 5 feet, 2 inches before bearing the greenish to brown flowers.

The first measurement was taken on March 3, and was 14 inches in length. In six days, it grew 20 inches to 34 inches. In four more days, it grew 15 inches to 49 inches. After that, the growth slowed as it prepared to bloom.



Texas Manfreda on March 2 measured 1 foot, 2 inches.



Texas Manfreda on March 8 measured 34.5 inches



Texas Manfreda on March 12 measured 49.5 inches

The final measurement of the entire stalk and bloom was 62 inches (5 feet 2 inches) on April 3. It did not increase in length while blooming and was in full bloom on April 8. The last bloom dropped off on April 21. This amazing plant makes it quite a conversation piece in your garden.



Texas Manfreda on April 3



Texas Manfreda measured 62 inches on April 3.



Texas Manfreda on April 8 measured 5 feet, 2 inches tall.

Plant in full sun to light shade in a well-drained soil with regular to little or no watering. This plant can survive even the driest years by going drought deciduous. If you cannot water this plant during drought, it will virtually disappear but return after rain. It is hardy to 0 degrees (USDA Zone 7).

Plant in mass for an interesting groundcover effect or as a border. Manfreda can be planted in sand, clay, or rock. They do very well in deep containers that have adequate space for this plant's extensive root system.

Remove older leaves that usually die back in winter. As new plants sprout from rhizomes, remove and plant them in other areas or in large pots.

Texas Tuberose is native to sandy scrublands in Southern Texas and in adjacent northern Mexico states of Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas. The rhizomes were used by indigenous North American people to make soap and shampoo.

In addition to habitat loss the plant faces the danger of being a favorite edible for javelina, armadillo, possums, and other small mammals. Many of the Manfreda found in the survey were under cactus and other heavily armored shrubs where animals feared to tread. This setting may be the reason for the development of the long flower stalk. It can shoot up through the shrubs and bushes to reach the sunlight and pollinators.

*The Gardener's Dirt is written by members of the Victoria County Master Gardener Association, an educational outreach of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Victoria County. Mail your questions in care of the Advocate, P.O. Box 1518, Victoria, TX 77901; or [vcmg@vicad.com](mailto:vcmg@vicad.com), or comment on this column at [Victoria Advocate.com](http://VictoriaAdvocate.com).*

## **References:**

*Books:* Richardson, Alfred and King, Ken, [Plants of Deep South Texas](#), Texas A&M University Press, 2011, p. 18-19

*Internet:* Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Plant Data Base-[https://www.wildflower.org/gallery/species.php?id\\_plant=MAVA](https://www.wildflower.org/gallery/species.php?id_plant=MAVA)

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***Photos contributed by Norma Friedrich***

**Research found many differences in common names of the Manfreda and to which scientific name they were attributed.**

Scientific Name: *Manfreda variegata*

Family: Agavaceae (Amaryllidaceae) is native to Cameron and Hidalgo counties of Texas.

Common names Mottled Tuberose and Liverspot Lily.

Scientific varieties in South Texas are *Manfreda longiflora*, *Manfreda maculosa*, and *Manfreda sileri*.