Anemopsis californica (T. Nuttall) W.J. Hooker & G.A. Walker-Arnott

Apache-Beads

- This monotypic member of the family Sauraraceae (sometimes alternately placed in the Ranunculaceae) is also known as Hierba Mansa, Lizzard Tail, Manso, Swamp Root, Yerba del Manso, or Yerba Mansa; the genus name means resembling Anemone; despite the specific epithet which refers to its California origins, A. californica is also native to other parts of the southern, central, and western U.S. including the Edwards Plateau and Trans Pecos regions of Texas.
- Plants spread via rhizomes, or sometimes stolons, to form colonies of short stoutish pubescent green flushed red stems 6” to 18” (24”) tall; relatively few leaves are produced per stem, with most arising in a rosette-like fashion from the crown of the plant; those leaves on stems are subtended by a bract-like sheath which encases the stem; the elongated ovate to oblong-elliptic leaves are fairly large, 2” to 6” (10”) long, with the larger leaves tending to be basal; blades are light gray-green to nearly bluish tinted in color, contrasting with the lighter yellow-green pinnate venation, and wavy undulate margins; bases are broadly cuneate, rounded, to cordate and tips vary from rounded, emarginate, to bluntly acute; petioles are stout, long and commonly flushed red; the overall effect of the plant is a moderately coarse texture; where cold temperatures occur, plants may take on a reddish or purplish cast in autumn.
- Pink fat conical axillary or terminal flower buds open to reveal compound inflorescences which appear to resemble in a vague way an old-fashioned single-flower type Zinnia, Rudbeckia, or perhaps Anemone in overall shape, whereas in reality the showiest parts of Apache-Beads’ inflorescence are the subtending white five to eight-parted involucre; the central cone-like spike consists of numerous tightly compressed tiny fragrant apetalous green flowers which are in turn each subtended by a small showy white bract; the resulting inflorescence thus giving the appearance of a 1” to 1½” diameter single flower which is effective in spring and early summer; ovaries of individual flowers are superior, stamens number six to eight, and two to four stigma are present.
- Being a warm season herbaceous perennial, A. californica can look rough in winter where it dies back to the ground and may benefit from being mown or pruned to within a few inches of the soil surface; plants can spread rapidly under favorable conditions forming a more or less solid groundcover during the growing season; Apache-Beads is sometimes grown for this purpose in boggy sites where other groundcovers may falter; it appears to tolerate full sun to partial shade and is commonly found in boggy areas or along margins of water courses and ponds in its native haunts; Apache-Beads tolerates alkaline soils and moderate salt exposure; Anemopsis californica is reportedly used in herbal treatments of burns and sores; see Moore (1989) for an extensive list of other medicinal and herbal uses; the spongy roots are mildly pungently spicy scented.