

Rubus trivialis A. Michaux

Southern Dewberry

(*Rubus duplaris*, *Rubus mcvaughii*, *Rubus riograndis*, *Rubus seorsus*)

Other Common Names: Dewberry, Trailing Dewberry, Wild Blackberry, Zarzamora.

Family: *Rosaceae*.

Cold Hardiness: Cold tolerance is not fully tested, but based on its native distribution *R. trivialis* can probably be grown in USDA zones 6 through 9(10).

Foliage: Semi-evergreen; palmately compound with three (trifoliate) to more typically five ovate-lanceolate to elliptic leaflets; leaflets 2 to 4 long by $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{4}$ wide at maturity on primocanes, smaller on floricanes; glabrous above with varying levels of pubescence and even an occasional prickle beneath along the veins; coarsely serrate or occasionally doubly serrate; tips acute; base rounded to cuneate; petioles and petiolules glandular and prickly with a green to red coloration; foliage is dark green in summer with no appreciable fall color.

Flower: The perfect flowers are borne one to three in small clusters on lateral branches (floricanes); the 10 to 20 diameter white five-petaled flowers occur in early to mid-spring; flowers are sometimes pinkish in bud; numerous stamens and pistils are present on a dome-shaped to elongated receptacle; flowers are moderately ornamental.

Fruit: Edible blackberry-like fruits, known regionally as dewberries, are produced in spring to early summer; botanically they are an aggregate of single seeded drupelets or berry; initially green, then red and finally black to black-purple at maturity.

Stem / Bark: Stems — arching or trailing slender canes rooting at the tips; canes are armed with both glandular and hard recurved prickles; stems are mostly biennial, being unbranched and vegetative the first year (primocanes) and then becoming floricanes, which produce lateral branches and flowers, in the second year; primocanes are green to red in color; Buds — foliose; very tiny, often $\frac{1}{32}$ or less long; green to red in color; Bark — not applicable.

Habit: Southern Dewberries are arching to trailing semi-woody vine-like or sometimes shrubby perennials that form spreading dense mats 1 to 3 thick of foliage and stems by suckering from the roots and adventitiously rooting where branch tips contact the soil; the overall texture is medium.

Cultural Requirements: Plants are often found in waste areas of varying fertility in nature; this is an opportunistic species that responds vigorously to supplemental irrigation and fertilization; plants will grow in about any soil that is not permanently soggy; site in full sun for best fruit production.

Pathological Problems: An orange rust caused by the fungus *Arthuriomyces peckianus* can cause witches' broom branching and an orange discoloration of the leaves; various insects including spider mites can be problematic on the foliage.

Ornamental Assets: Lustrous dark green handsome leaves from late winter to early summer and white flowers in mid-spring; this species can be effective as a barrier plant and attracts wildlife.

Limitations & Liabilities: Southern Dewberry is very weedy and aggressive in mixed plantings; prickles are maintenance liabilities and potential pedestrian hazards; plants appear lush and vigorous in spring, but tend to look rather rough from mid-summer to winter; one of our graduate students convinced us to leave some volunteers as a groundcover on the end of a bed near our parking lot at the TAMU Horticulture Gardens, we have been attempting to eradicate and keep them from spreading to the rest of the planting ever since.

Landscape Utilization: Usually encountered as a roadside weed of fields and waste areas, but *R. trivialis* will form a dense canopy and may serve as a stabilizing groundcover on banks or eroded sites; plants are far too vigorous and aggressive for use in mixed plantings with smaller shrubs or

herbaceous plants; some folks will tolerate masses of Southern Dewberry so they can pick the edible fruit; this species can be a good choice for providing wildlife food and cover in naturalized plantings.

Other Comments: *Rubus* is the ancient Latin name for blackberries or bramble-like plants and the specific epithet “trivialis” means common or ordinary; although the fruit of this species can be delicious and there is some potential present for selecting improved cultivars for this purpose, I always manage to get a bad case of chiggers (*Trombicula spp.*) whenever I pick through a patch; to make matters worse, poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) often intertwines the Dewberry thickets; hence the jams, jellies, tarts, pies or fresh fruit derived from these ventures seldom justify the personal cost; perhaps it may be worth paying the neighbor kids to pick them for you.

Native Habitat: Native to a large portion of the Southern US, including much of Texas exclusive of the Rolling and High Plains.

Related Taxa: The taxonomy of the genus *Rubus* L. is very confusing and much controversy exists as to lumping and splitting of species. Southern Dewberry is one of a dozen or so species of *Rubus* native to Texas. *Rubus flagellaris* C.L. Willdenow (Northern Dewberry) is a northern counterpart to *R. trivialis*, which ranges from the southern US to as far north as Québec and Ontario, useful in USDA zones 3 to 7.

Rubus L.

Blackberries

- C Some of these species are also known as Dewberry or Black Raspberry; these generally encompass the more erect taxa that are grown in home or commercial orchards of our region; the predominance of cultivars that are popular in home and commercial orchards are of hybrid origin, often with multiple parental species involved in the crosses; one of the more recently dominant parents in some of the new commercial hybrids is *Rubus ursinus* L.A. von Chamisso & D.F.L. von Schlechtendal which is also known as Blackberry, Pacific Blackberry, or Pacific Dewberry; *Rubus ursinus* is cold tolerant to USDA zone 7(6).
- C Use raised bed where soils are poorly drained; Blackberries are tolerant of acidic to moderately alkaline soils; pruning is needed to keep plants in check and to facilitate prolific fruit production, see Adams and Leroy (1992) and McEachern (1978) for some suggestions on pruning strategies and cultivar recommendations; ‘Brazos’, ‘Rosborough’, and ‘Brison’ are prolific TAMU releases, while ‘Navaho’ and ‘Arapaho’ are good thornless selections out of the University of Arkansas for northern portions of our region.
- C Blackberries vary in chilling requirements from 100 to over a 1000 hours, so choosing a cultivar with the proper climatic adaptation is important to successful culture in our region; for example, ‘Brison’ and ‘Hull’ are a low chill selections suitable for the coastal plains, whereas ‘Womack’ is better adapted to the northern portion of our region.
- C Double blossom or rosette disease, anthracnose, red neck cane borer (*Agrilus ruficollis*), crown gall, and thrips (order Thysanoptera) are common afflictions on blackberries in the Southern US; other pests include nematodes, strawberry weevil, spider mites, stink bugs, leaf-footed plant bugs (*Leptoglossus spp.*), and white grubs.
- C Red Raspberries (*Rubus idaeus* L., European Raspberry, Framboise) are often touted in mail-order catalogs but are generally poorly adapted to our region, performing much better in cooler climates; ‘Dorman’ (also listed under the name ‘Dormanred’) is one cultivar that survives to fruition in our region, but is still not particularly vigorous.

References: Adams and Leroy, 1992; Correll and Johnston, 1979; Diggs et al., 1999; Irwin, 1961; McEachern et al., 1997; Richenthin, 1972; Sperry, 1991; Tull, 1987.

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