**Quincula lobata** (J. Torrey) C.F. Rafinesque

**Purple Ground Cherry**

(Physalis lobata)

**Other Common Names:** Chinese-Lantern-Of-The-Plains; Purple Physalis.

**Family:** Solanaceae.

**Cold Hardiness:** Above ground portions are nearly subtropical or tropical, USDA zones 9b to 11, with roots overwintering as far north as USDA zone 7 (6) in mild winters; plants may also die to the ground in hot humid summers.

**Foliage:** Evergreen or die-back herbaceous perennial; alternate; simple; ovate to linear-lanceolate; 1½O to 3O(4O) long by (¼O ½Oto 1Owide; margins lobed to sinuate, slightly undulate; tips bluntly acute to obtuse; base cuneate; blades green to bluish green in color; the midrib light green to yellowish above; pinnately veined; scattered white vesicles are present that flatten, becoming scale-like with age; petioles markedly winged; no fall color.

**Flower:** The axillary ½Oto 1Odiameter five-petalled fused flattened (rotate) corolla is purplish blue to lavender-violet in color; a lance-shaped green stripe occurs on the back of each petal; the green bell-shaped calyx expands to encase the developing fruit; flowers are held above the foliage on long slender peduncles; showy; year-round in South Texas, seasonal bloom occurs in colder climates.

**Fruit:** A small ¼Ospherical yellow-green berry enclosed inside an inflated five-sided calyx.

**Stem / Bark:** Stems — green; small flattened scale-like white vesicles are often present; glabrous; four-sided and strongly angled; stems are rather sparsely branched; Buds — foliose; green; %Oto ¼O long; ; Bark — not applicable.

**Habit:** Very low, 2 Oto 3 O(4 Q) tall, sprawling evergreen or die-back rhizomatous perennial with 6 Oto 12 Olong stems originating from the base of the plant; medium to medium-coarse in texture.

**Cultural Requirements:** Roots fairly readily from mature cuttings, not so well from more succulent tissues; full sun and well drained soils are needed for best canopy and flower development; soil pH adaptable; avoid poorly drained soils and over-irrigation as plants rot easily when they remain too moist; plants tend to go dormant in the summer and flower, if not foliage, production is curtailed.

**Pathological Problems:** None serious as long as the soils are well drained and summers are not excessively humid.

**Ornamental Assets:** Low mat-like growth habit; nice contrast of bright green foliage and blue-violet flowers; this species provides good winter flowering in South Texas, spring and fall are peak times in areas with colder winters.

**Limitations & Liabilities:** Plants die to the ground in winter in most regions and sometimes in summer, at best with a serious lag in flowering occurring in summer; intolerant of pedestrian traffic.

**Landscape Utilization:** Permanent or seasonal groundcover depending upon the climate; possibly as a pot filler beneath leggy patio plants; this species has possibilities in a hanging basket or trailing over low walls.

**Other Comments:** I first learned of this plant on a trip to the lower Rio Grande Valley and was immediately excited about its potential as a groundcover; while still a good groundcover for the Rio Grande Valley, its tendency to go dormant in winter and summer in Central Texas muted this initial enthusiasm; worth considering for small areas in South Texas; the genus name is from the Latin words for five and little, perhaps referring to the five spots on the fused corolla tube; the specific epithet means lobed and refers to the leaves.

**Native Habitat:** Native to the Southern Plains of the USA, including the portions of North, Central, South and West Texas.
Related Taxa: No cultivars are presently described and the specie is only rarely found in the trade outside of the lower Rio Grande Valley; a white flowering variety *Quinclula lobata* (J. Torrey) C.F. Rafinesque f. *albiflora* Waterf. has been describe from Brown and Val Verde counties.

**Physalis alkekengi** L. (Physalis bunyardii, Physalis franchetii)

C Also known as Alkekengi, Bladder Cherry, Japanese Lantern, Strawberry Ground Cherry, Strawberry Tomato, or Winter Cherry; this introduced 1Nto 2N(4N) tall herbaceous perennial from Western Asia and Japan has ovate-deltoid to rhombic leaves; the 1Oto 2O long inflated pendent orange to red calyxes are the primary reason for cultivation; these fruiting structures are often used in dried floral arrangements.

C Chinese Lantern is typically grown in a sunny site with well drained soils; under favorable conditions the species can be come quite invasive and Still (1994) strongly counsels against including it in mixed borders; the species is hardy from USDA zones 3 to 9; it spreads readily via rhizomes and seed; striped cucumber beetles, and particularly in our region flea beetles, can be problematic.

C The genus name derives from the Greek word for bladder, referring to the fruit, while the specific epithet drives from the Arabic name for the species.

C *Physalis philadelphica* J.B.A.P.M. de Lamarck., known as Jamberry, Miltomate, or Tomatillo, is a closely related species occasionally grown for its edible fruit in Texas, and more frequently in Mexico.


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