

***Euphorbia tithymaloides* L.**

Devil's Backbone

(*Pedilanthus tithymaloides*, *Tithymalus tithymaloides*)

- The unusual form, foliage and flowers of *E. tithymaloides* have led to numerous descriptive and misleading common names including Buckthorn, Christmas Candle, Fiddle Flower, Jacob's Ladder, Japanese Poinsettia, Jew's Slipper, Milk Bush, Milk Hedge, Myrtle-Leaved Spurge, Padus-Leaved Clipper Plant, Red Bird Cactus, Red Bird Flower, Red Slipper Spurge, Ribbon Cactus, Slipper Flower, Slipper Plant, Slipper Spurge, and Zigzag Plant; the stout succulent strongly zigzag stems are the key identifying feature of this species; stems of this South American species are usually green and serve as the photosynthetic organ when the drought deciduous leaves are quickly lost as stems age or water stress occurs; stems often have a raised, nearly ledge-like swellings subtending the leaves, and buds are nearly encased in the thickened stems; these erect shrubs are variable in size from 6' to 8' tall and 1.5' to 2.5' wide.
- Leaves are alternate, simple, lanceolate, glabrous, and 1.5" to 3.0" long with acuminate tips and sessile bases, and undulate to entire margins; leaf color varies from green to green flushed red on the species type, while the popular cultivar 'Variegata' has white, green and sometimes pink variegated leaves and is somewhat smaller than the species type.
- Elf-slipper shaped bracts vary in color from pink to red and hang from short thin green to pink peduncles; the spring to summer flowers are somewhat sparse, but noticeable over an extended time, and attract hummingbirds.
- Devil's Backbone is a popular novelty shrub with a succulent appearance used in arid landscapes throughout the Southwestern USA wherever it is cold hardy, USDA hardiness zones 9b to 11; it is also popular for use in outdoor containers; *Euphorbia tithymaloides* is sometimes planted in landscapes to remediate toxic soils.