

Plant of the Season, Sponsored by the North Central Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas Operation NICE! (Natives Instead of Common Exotics!) – Fall 2017

Cenizo, *Leucophyllum frutescens*: Texas sage, a purple-flowering shrub for sun

Description: Cenizo's many common names allude to its Texas origins, habit and flower color: Texas Sage, Texas Ranger, Texas Rain Sage, Wild Lilac, Purple Sage, Senisa, and Cenicilla. The *Leucophyllum* genus name comes from Greek: *leucos* (white) *phyllon* (leaf), referring to this woody bush's silvery, gray-green, one inch leaves. The Latin species name *frutescens* means shrubby. Cenizo is in the figwort family and is not a true sage. It is an extremely drought- and heat-tolerant West Texas native, found in nature in calcareous, rocky soils. Cenizo usually grows up to 6 ft tall and 6 ft wide, with occasional specimens reaching 8 ft tall. It has a bushy, loosely-branched form. It is evergreen, although it may lose some leaves in the winter, and is cold-tolerant to 5 F.



Cenizo, Photos courtesy of Liz Moyer

Flowers and Seeds: Cenizo has 1/2 to 1 inch long, tubular, 5-lobed, medium-purple flowers that bloom from summer into fall. Typically, rains trigger Cenizo to flower prolifically; a reason another common name is Barometer Bush. Several cultivars with color variations exist: white-flowered 'Alba', lavender-blue blooming 'Rain Cloud', pinkish-flowering 'Green Cloud' with green foliage, lavender-blooming 'Sierra Bouquet' with whiter leaves, among them. After flowering, seeds form in valved capsules.

Planting sites: Full sun is best for Cenizo, although it will tolerate part-sun. It must have well-drained soil and should not be fertilized. Rich soil inhibits blooming and abundant moisture will shorten its lifespan. Cenizo may be grown in raised beds amended with crushed rocks.

Watering Instructions: Once established, Cenizo is maintenance-free and does not need supplemental water. Like many other native Texas plants, it will not tolerate "wet feet" and may rot over a wet winter.

Comments: Cenizo is popular for xeriscaping in Texas - it is a good choice for foundation planting and hedges, and is useful as a windbreak barrier or a screen. It is not unusual to see Cenizo as a sheared hedge, although light pruning to maintain a more natural shape may result in a healthier shrub. Cenizo can be grown in big pots as a large accent species. It is not susceptible to pests or diseases, except for cotton root rot, which well-drained soil discourages. It is said to be deer resistant. Cenizo may be propagated through seed or through cuttings. It is the larval host for the Theona Checkerspot and Calleta Silkmoth butterflies. Consider using Cenizo instead of non-native Photinia and Nandina species. Good companion plants for Cenizo include other xeric species, especially those with shapes that complement its bushiness. These include Blackfoot Daisy (*Melampodium leucanthum*), Zexmenia (*Wedelia texana*), Mealy Blue Sage (*Salvia farinacea*), milkweeds like Antelope Horn (*Asclepias asperula*), Gayfeather (*Liatriis mucronata*), and Four-nerve Daisy (*Tetaneuris scaposa*).

Look for the NICE! Plant of the Season signs and information sheets on your next visit to a participating North Texas nursery. Thank you for using native plants in your landscapes.

North Central Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas meetings are the 1st Thursday in Feb thru June, Aug thru Dec at the Ft. Worth Botanic Gardens, Ft. Worth, Deborah Beggs Moncrief Garden Center, Orchid Room, at 6:30 p.m.

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