

Water-wise Plants for the Rio Grande Valley

Common Name, <i>Scientific Name</i>	Native	Mature Size (height / width in feet)	Sun Exposure	Notes
Dwarf Shrubs (1-3 feet tall)				
Cast-iron plant, <i>Aspidistra elatior</i>		3' x 2'	partial shade / shade	dark green, bold textured, donkey ear-shaped foliage; use as contrast to fine textured shrubs
Carissa Boxwood Beauty, <i>Carissa macrocarpa</i>		2' x 2'	sun / partial shade	compact mounded shrub
Holly fern, <i>Cyrtomium falcatum</i>		3' x 4'	partial shade / shade	bold textured fern; year round glossy green foliage; suffers some foliage damage during hard freezes; use as contrast to fine textured plants and as groundcover
Red Yucca, <i>Hesperaloe parvifolia</i>	Central Texas	2' x 2'	sun	upright, stiff foliage; striking red flowers on 4-5 foot tall spikes; use in masses and for texture contrast
Dwarf yaupon holly, <i>Ilex vomitoria nana</i>		3' x 2'	sun / partial shade	Dense rounded, evergreen shrub; small white flowers in spring; salt spray tolerant
Liriope, giant, <i>Liriope gigantea</i>		2-3 by 2-3	sun / shade	fine textured, straplike leaves; use in masses or as large groundcover
Nandina, <i>Nandina spp.</i>		1 x 1 to 5' x 3'	sun / shade	varieties range from tall standard to compact to many new dwarfs; reddish, medium-textured, evergreen foliage; red berries in fall on standard and compact forms
Rosemary, <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>		1' tall	sun / partial shade	prostrate/trailing form; fragrant herb with bluish green foliage; blue flowers; extremely heat tolerant
Small shrubs (3-5 feet tall)				
Japanese aralia, <i>Fatsia japonica</i>		5' x 5'	partial shade / shade	bold textured, palmlike foliage; use as specimen or contrast to fine textured shrubs
Buford holly, <i>Ilex cornuta burfordii</i>		5' x 4' and 8' x 6'	sun / shade	dwarf and standard forms; glossy, medium textured, evergreen foliage; use as hedge, backdrop, or wall/screen
Dwarf Chinese holly, <i>Ilex cornuta rotunda</i>		5' x 5'	sun / shade	glossy, medium textured, evergreen foliage; use as hedge, backdrop, or short wall/screen
Primrose Jasmine, <i>Jasminum mesnyi</i>		5' x 6'	sun / partial shade	sprawling evergreen shrub; fine textured foliage; lemon yellow blooms in late winter to spring
Lantana, <i>Lantana spp</i>	RGV Native	1' x 3' to 6' x 6'	sun	Widely used in RGV; various colors flowers; mounding or trailing; foliage has pungent scent; tolerates nearly any soil, spider mites are an occasional problem.
Split Leaf philodendron, <i>Philodendron selloum</i>		4' x 4'	partial shade / shade	bold textured, tropical shrub; use for tropical effect and as contrast to fine textured shrubs and ferns

Indian Hawthorn, <i>Raphiolepis indica</i>		3' x 4'	sun / partial shade	spring flowering; blue berries in the fall; medium textured, evergreen foliage
Rose, shrub/landscape, <i>Rosa spp.</i>		various depending on variety	sun	Look for EarthKind roses - much more trouble-free
Rosemary, <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>		5' x 5' or creeping	sun / partial shade	aromatic, evergreen shrub; can be trimmed and shaped; trailing variety can serve as ground cover or in a pot

Medium Shrubs (6-9 feet tall)				
Pride of Barbados, <i>Caesalpinia pulcherrima</i>		9' x 6'	sun	Flashy orange, yellow, red blooms; fast grower; easily grown from seed; can become a weed problem; tolerates drought, reflected heat, and salty air
Elaeagnus, <i>Elaeagnus pungens</i>		6' x 6'	sun / partial shade	medium textured, gray green, evergreen foliage
Althea, <i>Hibiscus syriacas</i>		9' x 6'	sun / partial shade	old fashioned, upright, summer flowering shrub; deciduous, medium textured foliage; many flower colors (white to purple) in single and double forms
Italian Jasmine, <i>Jasminum humile</i>		6' x 7'	sun / partial shade	sprawling evergreen shrub; fine textured foliage; fragrant yellow summer flowers
Juniper, 'Sea Green' & 'Pfitzer'; <i>Juniperus chinensis</i>		5' x 5'	sun	fountainlike shrub with arching branches; fine textured, mint green foliage; use as hedge or mass plantings; many other junipers available but most not as dependable
Cenizo or Texas sage, <i>Leucophyllum spp.</i>	RGV Native	7' x 4'	sun	new varieties available of this native shrub; dusty gray to green evergreen foliage; Purple, pink or white bloom intermittent in summer
Agarita, <i>Mahonia or Berberis trifoliata</i>	RGV Native	6' x 5'	sun / partial shade	hollylike, blue green, evergreen foliage; yellow spring flowers; red edible berries; drought tolerant
Barbados Cherry, <i>Malpighia glabra</i>	RGV Native	7' x 6'	sun / partial shade	dense, evergreen shrub; dark green leaves; fine textured stems and suckering make this plant a good substitute for boxwood; fragrant flowers; cherry-like berries
Turk's Cap, <i>Malvaviscus arborus</i>	Native	6' x 4'	sun / shade	Spreads from root suckers and seeds; dark green maple-like leaves; red twisted mallow-like flowers; hummingbird favorite
Fragrant Sumac, <i>Rhus aromatica</i>	West Texas native	8' x 10'	sun	Fine textured shrub with dark glossy leaves; aromatic foliage; easy care
Pittosporum, <i>Pittosporum tobira</i>		9' x 9'	sun / shade	green, medium textured foliage on large evergreen shrub; variegated green/white variety available
Pomegranate, <i>Punica granatum</i>		3' x 2' and 8' x 6'	sun	dwarf and large, upright varieties available; carnation like orange blooms; orange to maroon edible fruit
Dwarf palmetto, <i>Sabal minor</i>		7' x 5'	sun / shade	bushy, trunkless native palm; extremely bold foliage

Esperanza or Yellow Bells, <i>Tecoma stans</i>	West Texas Native	6' x 4'	sun	Deciduous suckering shrub; yellow flowers occur sporadically from late spring to frost; prune occasionally to maintain structure
Large Shrubs/Small Trees (10-25 feet tall)				
Mediterranean Fan Palm, <i>Chamerops humilis</i>		12' x 12'	sun	multi-trunked, fan palm; very cold-hardy; can be grown in containers; smallish green to blue-green leaves
Desert Willow, <i>Chilopsis linearis</i>	Native to west Texas	20' x 15'	sun	small deciduous tree with willow-like foliage; blooms spring - fall; white, lavender, or maroon flowers; desert tree
Mexican Olive or Anacahuita, <i>Cordia boissieri</i>	RGV Native	10'-15' x 20'	sun / partial shade	Large showy white flowers from March through October; dark green foliage; messy 'olives' so don't plant over driveways or sidewalks.
Texas persimmon, <i>Diospyros texana</i>	Native	10-15 by 10-15	sun	large shrub to small tree; deciduous foliage; light gray trunk; female and male plants; fruit edible by wildlife
Nellie R Stevens' holly, <i>Ilex aquifolium x I. cornuta</i>		20-30 by 10-12	sun / partial shade	large, upright, evergreen; glossy, medium textured foliage; red berries; use as specimen or screen
Possumhaw holly, <i>Ilex decidua</i>		8-12 by 8-12	sun / partial shade	similar to yaupon holly yet deciduous; red to orange berries; use as specimen or grouping
Yaupon holly, <i>Ilex vomitoria</i>	Native	10-15 by 10-15	sun / shade	large, upright, evergreen, fine textured foliage; red to orange berries; great plant for wildlife
Crape Myrtle, <i>Lagerstroemia spp.</i> and hybrids		2 x 2 to 25 x 25	sun	dwarf shrub to multitrunked, huge shrub; summer blooming; many varieties
Wax Myrtle, <i>Myrica cerifera</i>		10-15 x 10-15	sun / partial shade	olive green evergreen foliage; unique foliage aroma; use as specimen to screen; dwarf variety available
Oleander, <i>Nerium oleander</i>		4 x 4 & 6-10 x 6-10	sun	dwarf and standard forms; evergreen foliage; vibrant summer blooming; many varieties available; use as hedge or screen
Cherry laurel, <i>Prunus caroliniana</i>		6-10 x 4-6	sun / shade	glossy, medium textured, evergreen foliage; treelike shrub; use as single specimen, cluster, or screen
Texas Mountain Laurel, <i>Sophora secundiflora</i>	Native to Central Texas	15' x 10'	sun / shade	multitrunked, evergreen tree/shrub; purple spring flowers smell like grape Kool-aid; use as specimen or screen
Vitex or Chaste Tree, <i>Vitex agnus castus</i>		15' x 12'	sun	multitrunked large shrub; palmate foliage; blue, lavender, or white flowers; summer blooming; use as specimen or screen; deciduous
Spanish Daggers, <i>Yucca treclueana</i>	RGV Native	to 15' tall	sun	Classic arid landscape plant; sword-like foliage; cluster of creamy white bell-shaped waxy flowers. Can withstand drought, salt, pollution
Trees				

Anacua or Sandpaper Tree, <i>Ehretia anacua</i>	RGV Native	25' x 30'	sun / partial shade	Dark green foliage; small white flowers in spring followed by golden berries; often two flowering/fruitletting per year; sometimes suckers from roots
Fan-Tex Ash, <i>Fraxinus velutina 'Rio Grande'</i>		40' x 30'	sun	deciduous; round canopy; first cultivated in San Antonio; usually does not set seed
Chinese Fan Palm, <i>Livistonia chinensis</i>		25' x 20'		slow-growing; cold hardy to San Antonio and Austin; pale yellow blooms; striking dark purple seeds
Mesquite, <i>Prosopis glandulosa</i>	RGV Native	30' x 30'	sun	Native tree that cast filtered shade. Log taproots allow tree to survive in arid regions. Trees can be single or multi trunk in form.
Bur Oak, <i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	Texas Native	50' x 60'	sun	deciduous; wide canopy; largest acorns of native Texas oaks; large leaves with rounded lobes; white oak
Chinquapin Oak, <i>Quercus muhlenbergii</i>	Texas Native	50' tall	sun	deciduous; light gray bark; leaf edges are toothed; can have Autumn color; attracts humminbirds; larvae host for grey hairstreak
Monterrey or Mexican White Oak, <i>Quercus polymorpha</i>		40' x 35'	sun	semi-evergreen rounded to oval tree with blue-green leaves; tolerates humidity well; hybridizes with Loquat Oak
Live Oak, <i>Quercus virginiana</i>	Texas Native	40' x 60'	sun	Appears evergreen but drops leaves and reflushes each spring; massive, widespreading canopy; dark green leaves; butterfly host; sometimes colonizes from roots
Texas Sabal Palm, <i>Sabal mexicana</i>	RGV Native	25' x 12' canopy	sun	Native to Brownsville; naturalized throughout Cameron County; spineless light green fan palm; cross-hatch trunk design
Bald Cypress, <i>Taxodium distichum</i>	Texas Native	70' x 40'	sun	Deciduous conifer; conical shaped, becoming flat topped in older age; sage green ferny foliage; terra-cotta hue in Autumn; heartwood is resistant to decay
Montezuma Cypress, <i>Taxodium mucronatum</i>	RGV Native	70' x 40'	sun	Evergreen in mild climates, but deciduous after a freeze. Fast growing with strong weeping branches. Interesting bark. Can have orange-brown fall color.
Cedar Elm, <i>Ulmus crassifolia</i>	Native		sun	Deciduous, droopy branches with corky ridges; rough bark similar to cedar; small leaves; yellow fall foliage some years
Mexican Fan Palm, <i>Washingtonia robusta</i>		60' x 15' crown	sun / partial shade	Fastest growing palm; naturalized throughout RGV; moderately salt tolerant
Ground Covers/Vines				
Coralvine or Queens Wreath, <i>Antiganon leptopus</i>		climbing to 20'	sun / partial shade	Pink summer blooms, bright green foliage; drought tolerant; salt tolerant; deciduous
Louisiana Artemesia/White Sage, <i>Artemesia ludoviciana</i>	Native to all of Texas except RGV	1'-3'	sun / partial shade	aromatic leaves have a white fuzziness; responds well to mowing; spreads by rhizomes;

Mondo/Monkey grass, <i>Ophiopogon japonicus</i>		6"-12"	partial shade / shade	Evergreen with lavender blooms in late spring/ summer; propagate by division; plant in shade; can be trimmed every few years to retain a tidy look
Passion Vine, <i>Passiflora incarnata</i>	Native	climbing to 10'	sun / partial shade	Herbaceous vine; purple and white blooms in summer; spreads by seed; butterfly plant; delicate perennial
(Green or Gray) Lavender Cotton, <i>Santolina chamaecyparissus</i> or <i>virens</i>	Mediterranean	18 x 24	sun	Fragrant mounding shrub; Narrow grey-green leaves; small yellow flowers, but mainly grown for foliage; clipping can be hung in closets as moth repellent
Hens-and-Chicks, <i>Sempervivum tectorum</i>		4" tall	sun	rosettes of succulent leaves; spread by suckering at base of plants; good in rock gardens and containers
Asian Jasmine, <i>Trachelospermum asiaticum</i>		spreading 6-12'	sun / light shade	Dark green small leaves; cold hardy; drought hardy; trim occasionally but slow to grow back after a drastic pruning
Ornamental Grasses				
Inland Sea Oats, <i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	Central to South Texas	4 x 3	partial sun / shade	clumping grass; drooping oat-like flower spikes; seeds eaten by small mammals and birds
Pampas Grass, <i>Cortaderia selloana</i>		10 x 6	sun / partial shade	Striking large clump; showy blooms; remove grasses/weeds thoroughly from planting bed prior to planting; sharp leaves are difficult to work around
Mexican feather grass, <i>Nassella tenuissima</i>	West Texas Native	18" x 18"	sun / partial shade	delicate feathery leaves; billow nicely with the slightest breeze; self-sows freely
Dwarf Fountain grass, <i>Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Hameln'</i>		24" x 18"	sun	compact growth; finely textured foliage; late summer cream colored feathery blooms; tough
Purple fountain grass, <i>Pennisetum setaceum 'Rubrum'</i>		4' x 3'	sun	Neat clumps of purplish-maroon blades; redish flower spikes throughout summer; good wildlife (bird) cover; trim in late winter