

## Focus on a Native: Turk's Cap

by CMG Betty J



Turk's Cap, *Malvaviscus arboreus*, is a perennial herbaceous shrub of the Mallow family. Its native habitat ranges in disturbed areas from the Edward's Plateau in central Texas to Florida, the West Indies and Mexico. Although it is relatively drought resistant it thrives more reliably in moist, humid locations near springs and streams and is somewhat shade tolerant.

This large shrub grows to about 4' tall on bushy stems that are woody at the base and herbaceous near the top.

Occasional specimens grow to 10' tall and beyond. Showy red flowers have a predominant stamen that rises from the center of the petals which are folded over each other and form the closed "cap" that gives it its common name. It's genus name means "sticky mallow." Bloom time is from June to October. The flowers ripen into an edible 5-lobed capsule in late summer and autumn. These berries are a favored food of many birds and mammals. The leaves of Turk's Cap are simple, alternate, have conspicuous veins, coarse teeth on the edges and are shaped like a broad heart. They are dark green on top with a lighter reverse side.



Although somewhat invasive, Turk's Cap is a good shade-tolerant ornamental for the residential or commercial landscape. Pruning in alternate years helps to contain its spread. Blossoms are an important nectar source for butterflies and the ruby-throated hummingbirds as they migrate through Texas in the fall. The fruit makes a tasty jelly.