



ask the landscape professional

Celebrating 20 Years!

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Email or mail your questions to: info@sprigsandtwigs.net or
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Thank you Readers for Voting Sprigs & Twigs
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Question this Week: *Linda, could you help me identify this plant? It's leaves fold up at night. Thanks....Malcolm*

Linda's Answer:

Hi Malcolm. The plant you have on your patio could be either a Wild Senna (*Senna hebecarpa*) or Cassia (*Senna marilandica*). It's hard to tell the difference between the two plants except at the time they produce their seeds. The *Senna hebecarpa* seeds fall out of its pod and the seeds of *Senna marilandica* stay tightly enclosed within the seed pod. In either case, it is a member of the Pea (*Fabaceae*) Family and is native to east coast of the United States. Its flowers and seeds feed a host of insects and ground dwelling birds such as Quail, Pheasant and Turkeys. Wild Senna grows to about 5-7ft tall and prefers sun-part sun and uniformly moist soil to thrive. It has an unusual yellow, open flower which is different from other flowers in the Pea Family. These flowers attract bumblebees and sweat bees and offer pollen, a nutrient rich food containing proteins, carbohydrates, fats and other beneficial nutrients, which the bees collect and take back to the hive to feed the growing larvae. Another unusual characteristic is that the flowers do not supply nectar for the visiting bees. The actual 'nectar' is found in little bulbous growths at the base of each stem called an 'extrafloral nectary'. These nectaries attract ants, flies, wasps and beetles.



Wild Senna is one of the many plants that have evolved to produce chemical compounds within its leaves and seed pods to deter being eaten by insects and animals. Anthraquinones are the particular chemical compounds found within Senna that also have medicinal uses as powerful laxatives. Thank you for that challenging question!

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 20 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..

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