



Anhinga
Laguna de las Garzas, Manzanillo
photo by John Chalmers



Around Manzanillo
History and Mythology
RV Travel
Nature's Wonders
So Much to See
Recipe
Learn Spanish
Path to Citizenship

In this issue

Around Manzanillo series *by John Chalmers*
Hiking to meet the birds...1

History and Mythology series *by Kirby Vickery*
Nezahualcóyotl,
A Toltec Ruler and Philosopher...10

RV Travel series *by Dan and Lisa Goy*
Sierra de la Laguna...12

Nature's Wonders
I Planted Roots in Mexico series
by Tommy Clarkson
Angel Wing Begonia..28
Snow Bush...31

So Much to See
Cuetzalan, Puebla...30

Recipe - Food and Drink
Chiles en Nogada...33

Spanish Skills
Crossword...36

Path to Citizenship (P2C)
Chiles en Nogada...37



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Publisher/editor: Dana Parkinson

Contact:

General info@manzanillosun.com

Dana Parkinson dana@manzanillosun.com

For **advertising** information in the magazine or web pages contact:

ads@manzanillosun.com

Regular writers and contributors:

- Suzanne A. Marshall
- Allan Yanitski
- Tommy Clarkson
- Dana Parkinson
- Terry Sovil
- Señor Tech
- Kirby Vickery
- Yann Kostic
- Dan and Lisa Goy
- Ruth Hazlewood and Dan Patman
- Ken Waldie
- John Chalmers

Special editing mention: El Gordo

Writers and **contributors** may also be reached via the following email:

info@manzanillosun.com

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Article submissions:

- Preferred subjects are Manzanillo and Mexico
- All articles should be 1000 words or less or may be serialized or 500-750 words if accompanied by photos
- Pictures are welcome
- Comments, letters to the editor, articles, photos and advertisements are always welcome

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Canadian and American “snowbirds” are not the only migrants who escape winter by spending it in Mexican sunshine and then returning home when spring comes! On my regular hikes in the Manzanillo area, some of my fine feathered friends that I photograph are also at home much further north in Canada and the United States.

One of the great joys of leaving cold weather and snow behind to migrate to our condo at Vida del Mar near Manzanillo is to take regular hikes to photograph birds at the beaches and lagoons in the area. Whether in long group hikes or just a walk around the property, a camera goes with me.

Hiking back at home and enjoying the birds in an urban environment is something that anyone can do in the parks, ravines and trails of their hometowns and cities. Just as Monarch butterflies migrate back and forth from México to parts of Canada and the United States, so do a number of species of birds. Part of the pleasure of being outdoors is to see birds that are either year-round residents or migratory visitors.

Whether you are a bird enthusiast or not, hiking gets you closer to nature. My hometown of Edmonton, the capital city of Alberta, is divided by the magnificent North Saskatchewan River. Along the riverside trails and in the city’s many parks and recreational areas, many species of birds are to be seen.

A favorite location for me is the big scenic Whitemud Ravine Natural Area, through which Whitemud Creek runs north to the river on the south side of the city. Several kilometers of trails follow the winding path of the creek. It is in that ravine that my grandson, Gianluca, and I often enjoy a hike along those trails. We are never disappointed, whether we are watching ducks and geese on the water or having chickadees eat sunflower seeds from our hands.

You gotta love digital cameras! It’s easy to shoot a hundred photos of birds, flowers and scenery along the creek in a single hike, and there is no cost at all for film and processing. After returning home, I edit photos to delete ones I don’t want, such as repeats of the same subject, pictures that are not quite in focus, and some that are blurred because the bird moved or flew off just as I pressed the shutter button.



The lagoon at left, and the beach at La Boquita, right, are both fine places for bird watching in the Manzanillo area. Cerro del Toro, the mountain at rear, is the biggest one in the area. It’s a great hike up the road to the very top!



Whitemud Ravine Natural Area, in the writer’s home town of Edmonton, is a big urban forest with excellent hiking trails and fine opportunities to enjoy nature and watch the birds along Whitemud Creek.

...Hiking to Meet the Birds



Urban trails like this provide a chance for a fine experience to enjoy outdoor life and hiking in a city. Edmonton has 160 kilometers (100 miles) of multi-use trails through its natural areas and parks.



You won't see any beavers in the Manzanillo area, but even in the northern urban areas with forests and water, you might come upon the results of beavers' work in cutting down trees!

A digital camera with high resolution and a good zoom lens to bring the subject close will help you get great photos. For scenics, a wide-angle position of the lens may be used and, for close-ups of flowers, the macro feature is a must. As well, most digital cameras will shoot high-resolution video and record sound. A feature of some digital cameras is the "burst" or continuous shooting mode that lets you take several still shots in one second, which is great for stopping action.

Years ago, I travelled with a large and heavy gadget bag that carried a 35mm single lens reflex film camera, wide angle and telephoto lenses, a motor drive, close up attachments and several rolls of film. In addition, I carried along a digital tape camera to record video! All of that has now been replaced with a versatile camera that fits in a pocket, a fanny pack or a case on my belt.

With digital photography and easy-to-use photo software, I can edit my photos with ease. I can copy and crop pictures, add text, adjust brightness and contrast, re-size pictures and send them by e-mail or post them on the internet. As well, the pictures can be used for slide shows and presentations. I can edit the video to share, to post or place on YouTube. The possibilities are endless, and I couldn't do that with film.

All you need for hiking in Mexico, Canada or the United States is appropriate clothing and footwear for the terrain and weather. A bottle of water is essential for long hikes and hiking poles

are often advantageous for safety and stability. To enjoy the birds, all you need are your eyes, sometimes binoculars, and a camera to let you bring the birds home. For further enjoyment, good bird books will teach you more!

Besides the internet, I mainly use bird books for reference at home and in Mexico. In both places, I have the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. At home, I have *Birds of Alberta* by Chris Fisher and John Acorn, and a copy of the huge issue of *The Birds of Canada* by W. Earl Godfrey. In Mexico, I keep a Peterson field guide to Mexican birds and *The Birds of Mexico and Adjacent Areas* by Ernest Preston Edwards. Just recently, I bought the *Pocket Birds of Canada*, a handy guide to take on a hike. There are dozens of good bird books on the market and you can probably find one for your province or state to help you enjoy your urban hikes and trips in the country. As well, there are some excellent apps, such as [Merlin](#).

I guarantee that learning the names of birds you see will add to the enjoyment of your hikes, whether in Mexico or wherever you live. Hiking is for fresh air, exercise and the birds—just take your camera and go! In the Manzanillo area, I have seen and photographed a hundred species of birds, and my list is still growing! You can see many more at a very informative web site when you [click here](#).

you can reach John at john.chalmers@manzanillosun.com
... more pics follow

...Hiking to Meet the Birds



At the La Boquita beach of Santiago Bay in the Manzanillo area, Brown Pelicans are seen regularly, enjoying a swim, meeting on the beach, or diving for fish.



A Great Egret, left, and a Snowy Egret, right, are two types seen at the La Boquita beach or lagoon. Smaller size, black bill and yellow feet identify the Snowy Egret.



Three types of hummingbirds in the Manzanillo area that come to the feeder from dawn to dusk. Left to right are the Black-chinned, Broad-billed and Cinnamon hummers.



You might have a chance to feed sunflower seeds from your hand to a Red-breasted Nuthatch anywhere in Canada or the United States, but you won't see one in México.



The Downy Woodpecker is seen throughout Canada and the U.S., but is another bird that doesn't travel to México.

...Hiking to Meet the Birds



The Golden-cheeked Woodpecker is endemic to México and common along the west coast, where you will hear its noisy chatter.



You won't confuse the big, Linneated Woodpecker with any other bird, seen from México south, a cousin of the Pileated Woodpecker in Canada and the U.S.



Chipmunks in Canada and the U.S. are always looking for a handout along the trails and welcome a lunch of sunflower seeds given to them by hikers.



Squirrels chattering at hikers from the trees of an urban forest, or coming up close for a snack of seeds or nuts, are among the creatures of northern forests.



The Black Vulture, left, is found throughout México and in the southeast States. The Turkey Vulture, far right, can be seen in all States and throughout México. The handsome fellow in the middle is a Crested Caracara. All three feed mainly on carrion.

...Hiking to Meet the Birds



Mallard ducks can be seen in fresh water habitats throughout North America from Alaska to México and south. Spring and early summer are good times to see young birds following their mother like this.



The Red-winged Blackbird is found throughout Canada, the U.S. and México. It is often seen in vegetation along freshwater marshes and sloughs.



Depending on the season, and whether breeding or wintering, Lesser Scaups can be seen from Alaska to southern México.



No, these splendid American White Pelicans weren't photographed at Lake Chapala! They are summer residents at a big stormwater lake facility in Edmonton, Alberta.



The American Avocet breeds in the Canadian prairie provinces and central U.S. states, and is shown here in its winter plumage, spending the winter in México.

...Hiking to Meet the Birds



No mistaking the American Oystercatcher often seen at the *laguna* behind *playa* La Boquita! It inhabits the east and west coast of México and the east coast of the U.S.



A regular at the La Boquita *laguna* is the Black-necked Stilt, found throughout México, the western U.S. and as far north as southern prairie provinces.



The small and beautiful Orange-breasted Bunting is endemic to México, and always a pleasure to see, one of at least three species of buntings in the Manzanillo area.



The flashy Yellow-winged Cacique, found in México and Guatemala, is spectacular when it flies, never spending much time in one place among the trees.



The White-breasted Nuthatch is found among the forests across the U.S., in western Canada, in parts of México and appreciates a handout of sunflower seeds.



Colorful and often noisy, Blue Jays are found across Canada and most U.S. states, but not in México. They do a great job of harvesting acorns from the author's trees!

...Hiking to Meet the Birds



Aptly named, the large Roseate Spoonbill is easy to identify at a *laguna*, with its rosy pink color and its distinctively long and spoon-shaped bill.



Easily identified with its long down-curved pink bill and pink legs, the White Ibis can plunge its entire bill into the edge of a lagoon to seek a morsel to eat.



Usually seen soaring above the water, these Magnificent Frigatebirds are taking a break from flying, perhaps waiting for the morning air to warm up and produce the thermal currents they enjoy for soaring. Common on coastal areas of México.



The Magnificent Frigatebird is indeed a magnificent bird, having a wingspan of nearly eight feet, the longest wingspan in proportion to weight of all birds. It can spend days and nights airborne without landing. Female shown here.



Three birds similar in plumage that are seen in coastal areas of México, left to right, are the Long-billed Curlew, the Marbled Godwit and the Whimbrel. Their long but different bills help to identify one from each other.

...Hiking to Meet the Birds



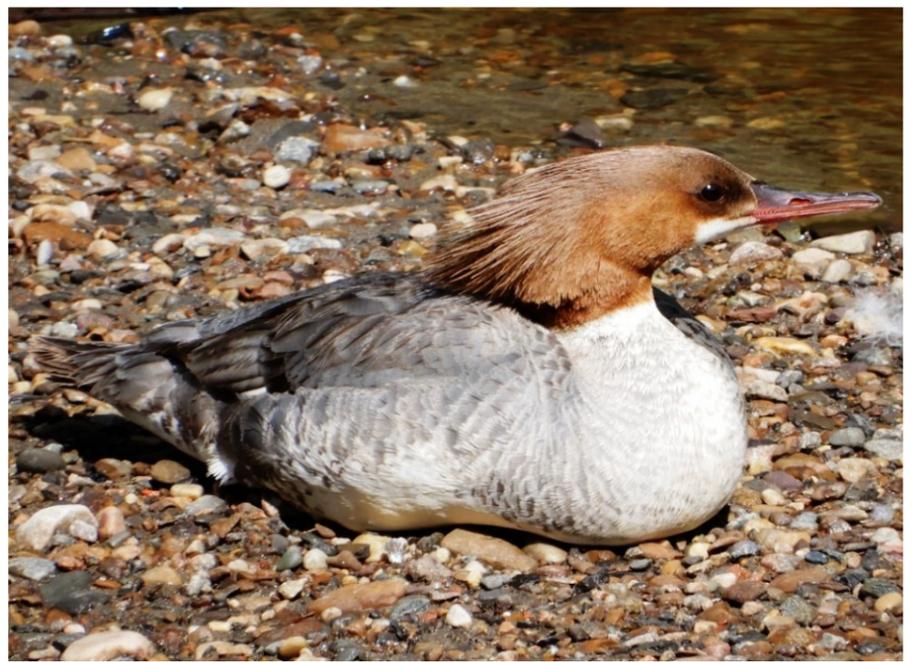
The Ringed Kingfisher can be seen in coastal areas of Mexico and, while you might see it in southern Texas, you won't in other states or anywhere in Canada. Its cousin, the Belted Kingfisher, is found throughout the U.S. and Canada.



The West Mexican Chachalaca is found only on the Pacific side of México and you won't mistake this large bird for any other! Its loud cackle is often heard from the trees when they seem to be calling each other or maybe just enjoy making noise!



Two female Common Goldeneye ducks are seen here taking a break and enjoying the sun. Common in Canada and the U.S., you won't see them in México.



The red head with unruly "hair" makes it easy to help identify the female of the Common Merganser species, another bird common in Canada and the U.S.



Three herons seen at the *lagunas* in the Manzanillo area. Left to right are the small and colorful Green Heron, the bigger Little Blue Heron, and the even bigger Tricolored Heron.

...Hiking to Meet the Birds



On east and west coasts of México, the Reddish Egret is often seen in the *laguna* at La Boquita, dancing in the water with wings outspread to scare fish to catch.



The Great Kiskadee is a colorful bird about the size of a robin, but not nearly as musical, and is found in many parts of México.



The handsome Royal Tern is often seen in the company of gulls along the shore of the La Boquita *laguna* and can be found on both coasts of México.



The Yellow-crowned Night Heron, found on east and west coasts of México and the southeast U.S. is a favorite subject because it is so handsome and patient in posing!



Nearly four-feet tall, with a wingspan of six feet, the beautiful Great Blue Heron is well travelled, found throughout Canada, the United States and México, and was photographed at the La Boquita *laguna*.



Writer/photographer John Chalmers is shown with his 11-year old grandson, Gianluca, on one of their urban hikes, enjoying nature and the bird life in the Whitemud Ravine Natural Area.

Nezahualcóyotl, a Toltec Ruler and Philosopher

story by Kirby Vickery

So often, when folks travel through Mexico and Central America while searching for all these wonderful ruins left behind by all these wonderful Mesoamerican tribes and nations, they find so much and so many that entire nations slip by almost as if they weren't there. It's sort of like a game of chess more than "It's Wednesday, Martha, so we must be in Mixtec land." Everybody knows about the Aztecs. They're the ones Hernán Cortés took Mexico from. And the Aztecs were short-run insurgents from some place up North who took their place in the hierarchy of Empires and Nation States in the "New World." They took it all from the Mayans who were on their last legs anyway.



Nezahualcoyotl as depicted in the 16th century Codex Ixtlilxochitl.

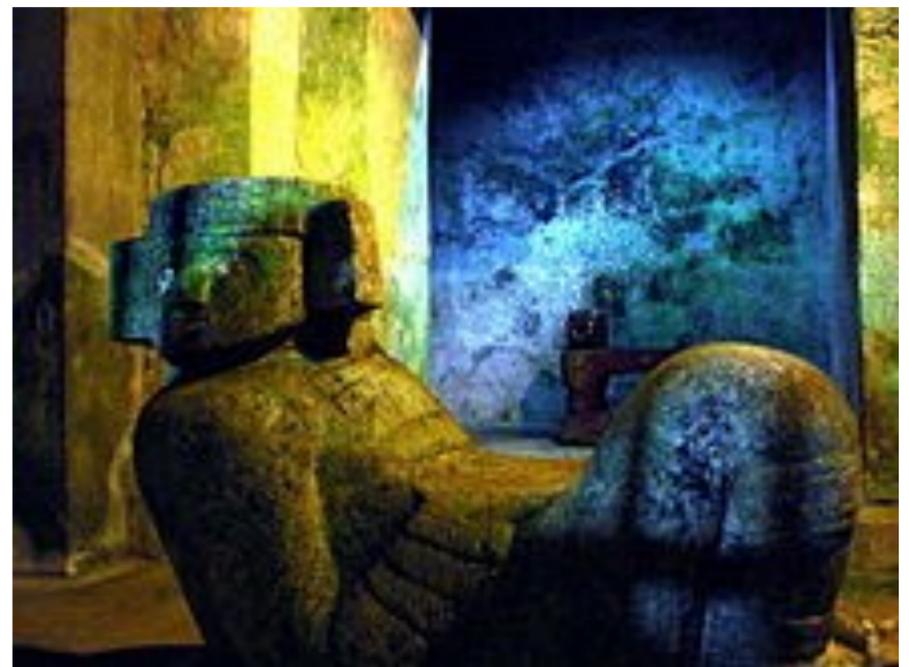
And, yes, some of the Toltec noble warriors wore beards.

That's not quite right. You see, there are a number of Mesoamerican peoples and one of the largest groups (they had cities of 50,000 to 85,000 people) to come down from the American western desert was the Toltec.

They were very warlike and well trained, with their own pantheon of gods and layered society with slaves, ruling class, merchant, farmer and worker classes. These folks also had those among them recognized for their talent, wit, intelligence and philosophies. One of the greatest was Nezahualcoyotl.

Nezahualcoyotl, meaning "Coyote in fast" or "Coyote who fasts" (April 28, 1402–June 4, 1472) was a philosopher, warrior, architect, poet and ruler (tlatoni) of the city-state of Texcoco in pre-Columbian era Mexico. Unlike other high-profile Mexican figures from the century preceding Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire, Nezahualcoyotl was not Mexica. His people were the Acolhua, another Nahuatl people settled in the eastern part of the Valley of Mexico, on the eastern side of Lake Texcoco. In either case, he was a Toltec and was part of a people of great ferocity in battle being very warlike.

All this goes to show you that even the most vicious people had philosophers and this man who was a true intellect. But, he also proved that all the intellect and 'smarts' in the world don't stand a chance in a world of misguided love.



A Chacmool (Example of Toltec art) in the temple of Kukulkan in Chichén Itzá (Mayan).

Nezahualcoyotl profited by the hard experiences he had undergone even in the defeat of Maxtla (his city state), and proved a wise and just ruler. The code of laws framed by him was an exceedingly drastic one, but so wise and enlightened was his rule that he deserves the title "The Solon of Anahuac" which has been conferred upon him.

He generously encouraged the arts and established a Council of Music, the purpose of which was to supervise artistic endeavor of every description. In Nezahualcoyotl, Mexico found,

...Nezahualcōyotl, a Toltec



An example of Toltec art -

A statuette from Chupícuaro

in all probability, her greatest native poet. An ode of his on the mutability of life displays much nobility of thought and strikingly recalls the sentiments expressed in the verses of Omar Khayyam.

He is said to have erected a temple to the Unknown God, and to have shown a marked preference for the worship of one deity. In one of his poems, he is credited with expressing the following exalted sentiments: "Let us aspire to that heaven where all is eternal and corruption cannot come. The horrors of the tomb are the cradle of the sun, and the dark shadows of death are brilliant lights for the stars."

Unfortunately, these ideas cannot be verified as the undoubted sentiments of the royal bard of Texcoco and we are regretfully forced to regard the attribution as spurious. We must come to such a conclusion with very real disappointment, as to discover an untutored and spontaneous belief in one god in the midst of surroundings so little congenial to its growth would have been exceedingly valuable from several points of view.

We find Nezahualcōyotl a just and fair ruler but it all came apart when he discovered his eldest son, the heir to the crown, entered into an intrigue with one of his father's wives and dedicated many passionate poems to her, to which she replied with equal ardor. The poetical correspondence was brought before the king, who prized the lady highly because of her beauty.

Outraged in his most sacred feelings, Nezahualcōyotl had the boy arraigned before the High Court which passed sentence of death upon him—a sentence which his father allowed to be carried out. After his son's execution, he shut himself up in his palace for some months and had all the doors and windows of the unhappy young man's residence built up so that never again might its walls echo to the sound of a human voice.

you can reach Kirby at kirby.vickery@manzanillosun.com



Sierra de la Laguna

by Dan and Lisa Goy

Sierra de la Laguna, BCS

Exploring the northern foothills of Sierra de la Laguna from Mex 1

Our RV tours on Baja take us through the northern foothills of Sierra de la Laguna on Hwy 1 between La Paz and Los Barriles. We routinely stop for brunch and a look around in El Triunfo and then a short drive past San Antonio to our destination, Rancho Verde RV Haven, for the night.

The next day, we head off to Los Barriles on the East Cape, which takes us through San Bartolo as we descend to the coastline. For those that have more time, this entire region has lots to see and do, much different from your experiences in La Paz, Los Barriles or Los Cabos.

El Rosario

Driving southbound on Hwy 1 before you get to El Triunfo is the Ejido community of El Rosario and the Cactus Sanctuary of Baja California Sur. Located only 45 minutes to the south of La Paz (the capital of the Mexican state of Baja California Sur), Santuario de los Cactus is 50 hectares of parkland which has been divided into 50 distinct areas to preserve cacti and endemic plants found only in this part of the globe. When we visited, some years ago, the entrance was open and no fee was collected. This was well worth a visit.



El Rosario, Baja California Sur (BCS)

There is a large sign on Mex 1 for the Cactus Sanctuary, on the right, when southbound. El Rosario itself is actually past the Sanctuary entrance and is very small. Often there are local crafts available, some unique pottery.



El Triunfo church, Ramona chimney in the background

El Triunfo

Although El Triunfo started as a cattle ranch in the early Jesuit period, it is best known as a former mining town that straddles Hwy 1. Located at an elevation of 483 meters (1,585 feet) above sea level, it has a population of under 800. Many RVers who travel to Baja, Mexico, often pass through El Triunfo without stopping at this unassuming town that is only about four blocks long.

In many ways, the town has the feel of a turn-of-the-century movie set, complete with heritage building facades, a two-tone church, cobblestone streets and old smoke stacks. Snowbirds often drive through heading north to La Paz or south to Los Barriles, San José del Cabo or Cabo San Lucas.

The first mine in El Triunfo was established by Manuel de Ocio in 1748. Ownership of the mine was temporarily transferred to the Spanish Crown at one point and the mine remained largely unsuccessful. In 1862, silver and gold were discovered in the southern Baja California Sur Mountains, leading miners from Mexico and the United States to rush to settle in El Triunfo in a gold rush.

Many of the miners had participated in the 1849 California gold rush. In 1878, the mine was taken over by the British El Progreso Mining Company and became more successful. Once the largest city in Baja California Sur, it was home to more than 10,000 miners.

...Sierra de la Laguna

El Triunfo was the first town in the region to install electricity and telephones. In its heyday, the town was a cultural center, where Francisca Mendoza taught and performed. Pianos and other instruments were brought to El Triunfo from around the world. In fact, El Triunfo had more pianos per capita than any other city in Mexico, hence the music museum. Cultural life included regular concerts and two competing weekly newspapers.

When mines shut down in 1926, the town was largely abandoned. Parts of the old mine installations can still be seen, including two massive chimney stacks, "La Ramona", 47 meters high, designed by famous French engineer Gustave Eiffel and named after Saint Raymond, on whose feast day the project was completed. After more than 100 years, the smokestack was cracked and damaged and collapse during an earthquake or hurricane was a concern. In 2018, the non-profit International Community Foundation (ICF) and the Corredor Histórico CAREM, A.C. collaborated to restore La Ramona for an estimated \$200,000 USD.



Ramona in the distance, El Triunfo, BCS

Follow the path lined by the white rocks to head up to the mirador lookout, where you'll get a beautiful view of the little town and the surrounding mountains. Halfway up the path to the mirador is a side jaunt to the walled-in Panteón Inglés cemetery, with 13 white aboveground mausoleums of English citizens who once worked in the mines.

The other chimney stack is "Julia", near to which mining machinery manufactured in Chicago and San Francisco has lain rusting and forgotten since the mines closed. We understand a Museo de Plata is on the drawing board and the mining muse-

um will be opening to the public soon. The museum will tell the history of the mine and the region through interactive exhibits that will bring to life the rich history of the area.

The town has made impressive strides in the past decade to attract more tourists. The change in El Triunfo started slowly, a few years ago, when Marcus Spahr, who had previously run Caffé Todos Santos for 16 years, left the West Cape and opened Caffé El Triunfo. It turns out this was a game changer for this sleepy little town.



It is much more than just the wood-burning oven, freshly baked bread and pizza. Mark's menu includes a "Chicken enchilada Omelette"! which comes with fried potatoes, fresh fruit, homemade bread and sliced avocado and crema. Our mouths water just thinking about it! One of our clients ordered the fish tacos and said they were the best, made with Ahi tuna! The oven-fired sourdough loaves are delicious, particularly the cranberry walnut, our favourite. Mark has done an outstanding job on this café and has really brought this little town to the forefront for Baja travellers.

The mining ghost town that time once seemed to have forgotten is now abuzz with hundreds of tourists each weekend. Our first visits always include a visit to the wonderful music museum. On our last visit, once inside, we were greeted by Maestro

...Sierra de la Laguna

Nicolás Carrillo Castro who personally conducted the tour of the museum. If you are fortunate, Sr. Castro would tickle the ivories for you. His flamboyant style will bring visions of a Mexican Liberace. Sitting in the audience as the Maestro is playing Beethoven and Bach on the Baldwin grand piano was truly an unforgettable experience. Sadly, Nicolás Carrillo, passed away a few years ago, and the museum has not been well taken care of since then, however still worth the 20 pesos and a visit.

In recent years, to attract tourism, many of the original buildings have been restored and converted into restaurants, museums, boutiques and other businesses. Caffé El Triunfo has recently been joined by the refreshingly chic Bar El Minero. The building that houses El Minero is over 120 years old and was once the laboratory for the mines.

Today, the space is beautiful and inviting, with upcycled bottle light fixtures, locally crafted wood tables, and a long bar. The expansive outdoor space has plenty of seating, fire pits, and views of the old smokestacks. El Minero serves craft beer on tap, as well as house-made artisanal sausages, salads, and local cheeses. Chef Felipe studied at culinary schools in San Diego and Tijuana and his sophisticated understanding of flavor profiles shines through in everything he makes. On Sundays, there is a large paella fest that draws locals and visitors for a very fun afternoon. Don't visit without dressing up to take your photo with the bronze sculpture of Sofia and Juan Matute in the courtyard. All of the attention is leaving some people wondering - is El Triunfo, the next Baja "it" spot? We believe it is.



San Antonio

San Antonio has about 400 inhabitants, situated at 400 meters (1,312 ft.). Loreto was the original capital of the peninsula until 1830, when destruction of the town by heavy rains forced the government's relocation to San Antonio for 2 years before moving to La Paz, which has been the capital since. The inhabitants of San Antonio are overwhelmingly in favour of the Los Cardones Gold Mine as they stand to benefit immensely since a great deal of the mine sits on Ejido land.



Rancho Verde RV Haven

Rancho Verde RV Haven (GPS 23.76278 N, 109.97944 W) is located on a 3100-acre ranch in the Sierra de la Laguna mountains, just off Highway 1, at kilometre 142, between San Bartolo to the south and San Antonio to the north, at an elevation of 1700 Feet/520 Meters in the Sierra de la Laguna Mountains. This is an operating 3100-acre ranch, that includes a 200 acre "RV Haven" with an accompanying campground.

This campground has potable water for water containers, a dump station at every site, but no electricity. Please do not wash your vehicle or fill up your tanks. Water is in short supply. The showers are hot and they have flush toilets.

Here, you can enjoy hot sunny days and cool nights with gorgeous vistas and sunsets. There are miles of trails for hiking and the bird watching here is fantastic!

We always ask our guests not to run their generators for air conditioning. Although it may be very hot when they arrive, when the sun goes down, Mother Earth's AC turns on. It has been 38C (100F) when we arrive and 5C (40F) at sunrise. The serenity is precious!

...Sierra de la Laguna

Wi-Fi with AC power is available at the common building central to the campground as are hot showers and flush toilets just a short stroll away. The rates; daily, weekly or monthly are very reasonable. You can tent or take your big rig. Everyone is welcome and all sizes can fit. On the ranch itself, there are miles/kilometres of trails for hiking, horseback riding (see the rancho next door), ATVing or dirt biking. Lots to see and the vistas are stunning.



Rancho Verde camping

This campground is one of our favourites because it is so very different from all the others in Baja Sur. It also often reminds us of camping in the mountains back in British Columbia, Canada. Rancho Verde "RV Haven" advertises "...a relaxed atmosphere only minutes from the hectic life of the beach communities – the real Mexican lifestyle that everyone is seeking and hardly finds! Peaceful, carefree living amid scenic wilderness and mountains of greenery, a beachfront launch site, guided fishing tours for those without boats, and a total security package for your peace of mind while you are away from the premises" and they deliver.



Rancho Verde mountain views

This ranch is also a bird watchers' paradise. Fred and Joyce Harrington spent a week in February of 2008 at Rancho Verde and reported observing over 50 species of birds including many varieties of hawks, owls, doves, hummingbirds, woodpeckers,

wrens, warblers and flycatchers. A pair of resident Crested Caracaras can often be seen in the horse paddock as visitors arrive and, if you scatter some birdseed, provide a bowl of water or put out a hummingbird feeder, we guarantee other birds will show up. For Campers and RVers, Rancho Verde is an excellent location to stage from for day trips about and around this very unique and interesting region.

San Bartolo is a scenic tropical village, complete with thatched roof homes, 10 miles north of Los Barriles, as you begin your climb into the hills. This is a great place to return to and buy mangos, avocados, locally made candies and some of the most incredible of the local treats, fruit filled empanadas. A large, spring-fed arroyo runs along the base of the valley and provides this pleasant town with a bountiful supply of fresh water. ATV trips from Los Barriles are very popular. They simply drive from the beachside community up the dry arroyo. Our guests have participated in many.



San Bartolo oasis

Sierra de la Laguna

The Sierra de la Laguna is a mountain range at the southern end of the Baja California Peninsula in Mexico, and is the southernmost range of the Peninsular Ranges System. It is located in both the La Paz Municipality and Los Cabos Municipality. The "Sierra de la Laguna High Point", at 6,857 feet (2,090 m) in elevation, is the highest point of the range and in Baja California Sur state. Not well known is that the southern tip of the Baja California Peninsula, including the Sierra de la Laguna, was formerly an island in prehistoric times. It has a distinctive flora and fauna, with many affinities to Southwestern Mexico. The Sierra is home to many endemic species and subspecies.

The dry San Lucan xeric scrub Eco region extends from the sea level at the coast to 250 metres (820 ft) in elevation. The Sierra de la Laguna dry forests Eco region occupies the lower portion

...Sierra de la Laguna

of the range, from 250 - 800 metres (820 - 2,620 ft) in elevation. Above 800 metres (2,600 ft) in elevation, the dry forests transition to the Sierra de la Laguna pine-oak forests Eco region.

The composition of the pine-oak forests varies with elevation. Oak woodlands predominate, from 800 - 1,200 metres (2,600 - 3,900 ft) in elevation, with oak-pine woodlands between 1,200 - 1,600 metres (3,900 - 5,200 ft) in elevation, transitioning to pine-oak forests above 1,600 metres (5,200 ft) in elevation. The predominant pine is a local subspecies of Mexican Pinyon, *Pinus cembroides* subspecies *lagunae*. The forests are exploited commercially for timber and cattle raising is common in the oak woodland and dry forest zones.

Biosphere Reserve

UNESCO has designated the Sierra de la Laguna a global biosphere reserve: "This semi arid-to-temperate, sub humid climate area represents highly important and contrasted ecosystems, including arid zones, matorrales, low deciduous forest type, evergreen oak: *Quercus devia* ("encino") woods, pine-evergreen oak mix woods and oases with palms and "guerivos" situated throughout the gallery forest following the long river basins."

The Biosphere reserve was established by a Mexican presidential decree of 6 June 1994 which designated a core area and buffer zones. The core area is centered on the higher-elevation oak-pine forests, while the transition area includes the communities of Todos Santos, El Pescadero, El Triunfo, San Antonio, San Bartolo, Buena Vista, Los Barriles, Las Cuevas, Santiago and Miraflores.

Los Cardones Gold Mine

In November 2012, the federal Environment and Natural Resources Secretariat refused a request to allow open-pit (opencast) mining in the buffer zone of the Sierra La Laguna Biosphere Reserve in Baja California Sur. The request came from Zapal SA de CV whose mining project, currently named "Los Cardones", is located about 60 km from La Paz, the state capital. The project involved 423 hectares of semi-arid scrubland from which Zapal hoped to extract 40 metric tons (estimated reserves of 1.2 million ounces) of gold in the next decade. The \$217-million project would have created around 2200 jobs. Controversy has embroiled this project from Day 1 with locals and expats.

The project is close to the small settlements of El Triunfo, San Antonio and El Rosario. This mining project was previously called "Paredones Amarillos" and "La Concordia". The original Concordia project, proposed by US mining firm Vista Gold and



Mining engine in San Antonio

Toronto-listed Argonaut, was opposed on environmental and public health grounds by several environmental groups including the Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA). A tribunal quashed the original environmental permit issued for a controversial gold mine in Baja California Sur.

The latest version, Los Cardones, was resubmitted to authorities in September 2014, submitted by the mine's developer, Desarrollos Zapal, a subsidiary of Invecture, a Mexican firm linked to Grupo Salinas. Mine opponent, Irina Trasviña of Frente Ciudadano, or Citizens' Movement, said the ruling against the project represented "a national and international precedent that has succeeded in stopping, for the fourth time, a mining megaproject that threatens our water and consequently our quality of life." In 2017, a federal tribunal quashed an environmental permit that had been issued for it.

Last September (2018), residents demanded that then president-elect López Obrador commit to stopping the mine from going ahead but, at the time he was non-committal and instead proposed a consultation.

On March 3, 2019, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador announced the cancellation of the project to exploit the Los Cardones open-pit gold mine, promoted by the company Desarrollos Zapal.

The president had said previously that the proposed Los Cardones open-pit mine project, located within a buffer zone of the Sierra de Laguna biosphere reserve in the municipality of La Paz, would be put to a public consultation but that plan has now been scrapped. The president explained that he did not support the mine because "we have to look after paradise, not destroy paradise."

... more pics follow

...Sierra de la Laguna



Back street in El Triunfo



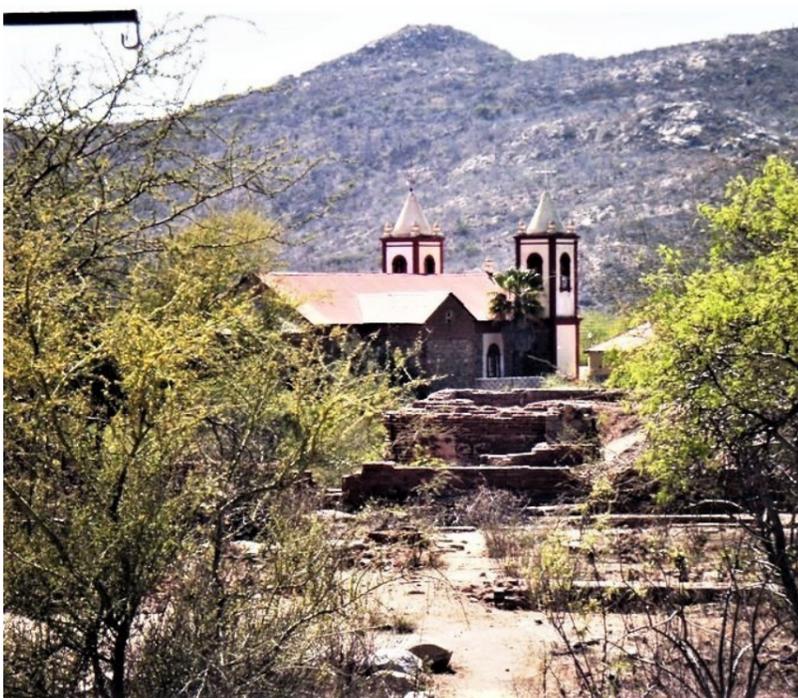
Baja Amigos group in El Triunfo



El Triunfo Caffé lower patio



Brunch on the lower patio



El Triunfo church from the smelter area



Region map

...Sierra de la Laguna



North entrance to El Triunfo



Vendors' market, El Triunfo



Visitor from Sweden,
mine safe



Smelter towers, Ramona and Julia



South end of El Triunfo

...Sierra de la Laguna



Strolling down the road from Caffé El Triunfo



Reconstruction, El Triunfo



Restored shop in El Triunfo



Front counter at Caffé El Triunfo



Horses in El Triunfo arroyo



Hwy 1 parking, El Triunfo

...Sierra de la Laguna



Inside a restored home in El Triunfo



A new shop in El Triunfo



New patio area in El Triunfo



Green Angels coming through El Triunfo



Sr. Nicolás Carrillo Castro, Museo de la Música, El Triunfo



Ken Goy at La Ramona

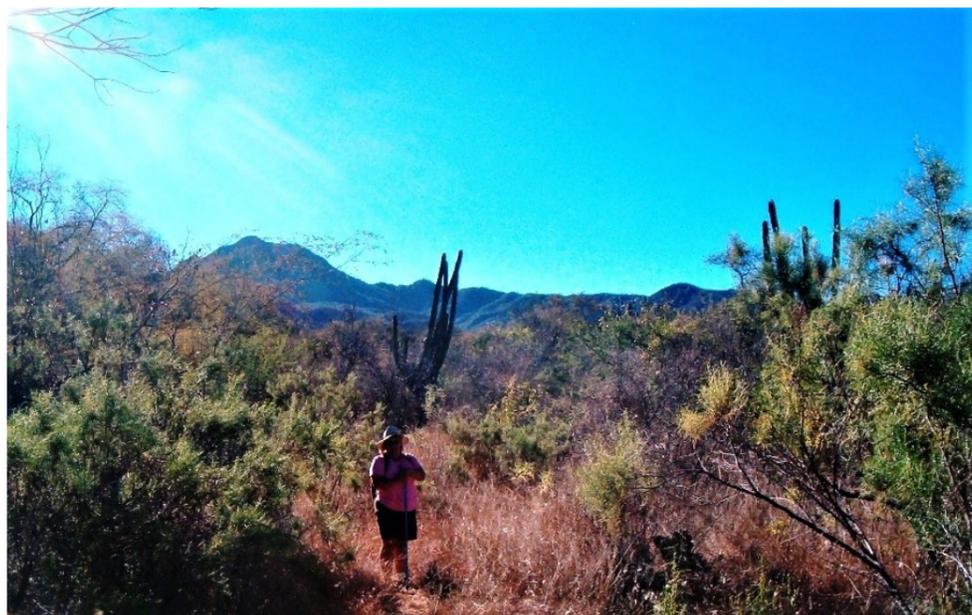
...Sierra de la Laguna



Sunrise at Rancho Verde camping area



Northern Cardinal at Rancho Verde



Lisa hiking at Rancho Verde



Rancho Verde cactus



Rancho Verde campground



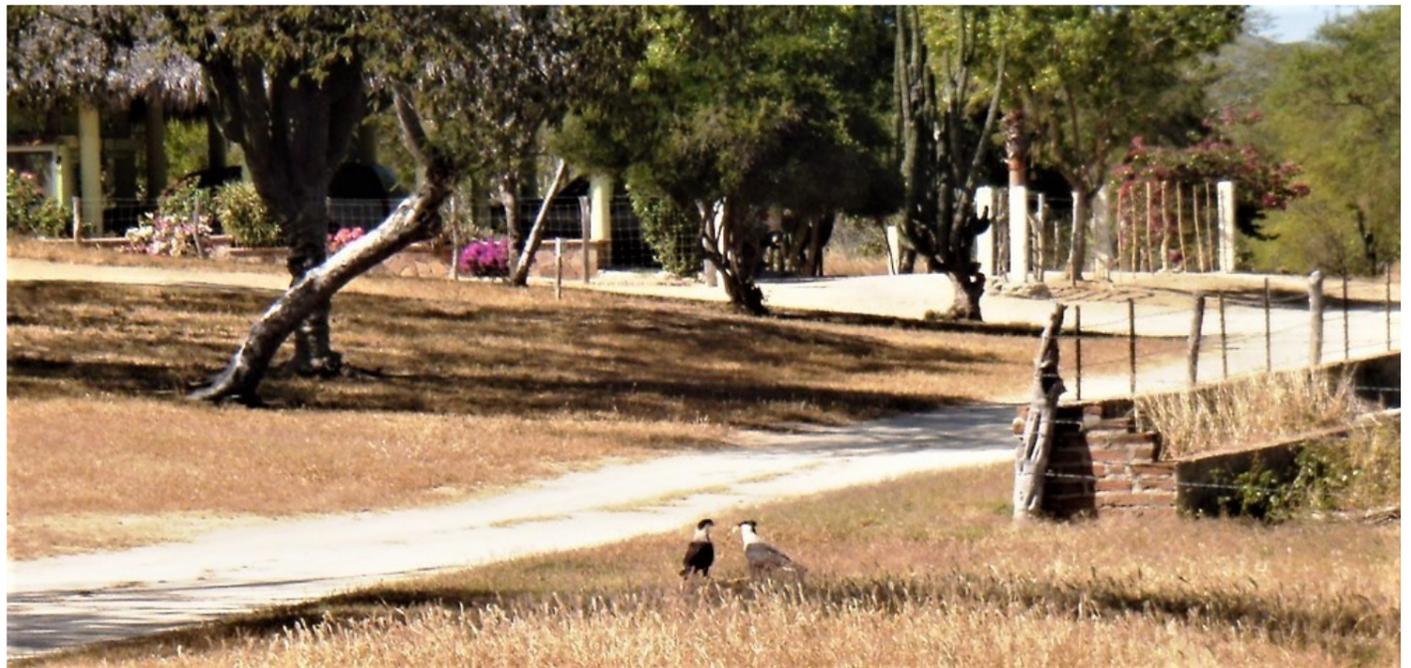
Resident iguana at Rancho Verde

...Sierra de la Laguna



Community room at Rancho Verde

Crested Caracara at Rancho Verde



Staircase construction, Rancho Verde



Rancho Verde happy hour

...Sierra de la Laguna



Beautiful hummingbird at Rancho Verde



The gang on a walk around Rancho Verde



Baja Amigos caravan visiting a home site in Rancho Verde



New roof required for the common area at Rancho Verde



Campground at Rancho Verde

...Sierra de la Laguna



Casita in Rancho Verde RV Haven



Dom on the rooftop at Rancho Verde



Easy hiking at Rancho Verde

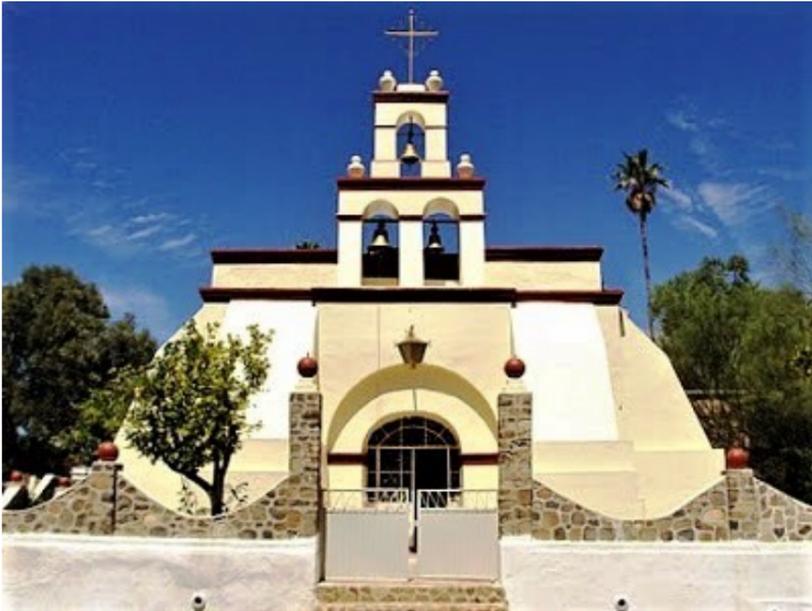


Goy family photo at Rancho Verde



Bob and Mark, Rancho Verde, Sierra de la Laguna

...Sierra de la Laguna



San Antonio church



View from on high, San Antonio



San Antonio, BCS



Birds are many in Sierra de la Laguna



Long view of the San Bartolo Cemetery



San Bartolo Cemetery up close

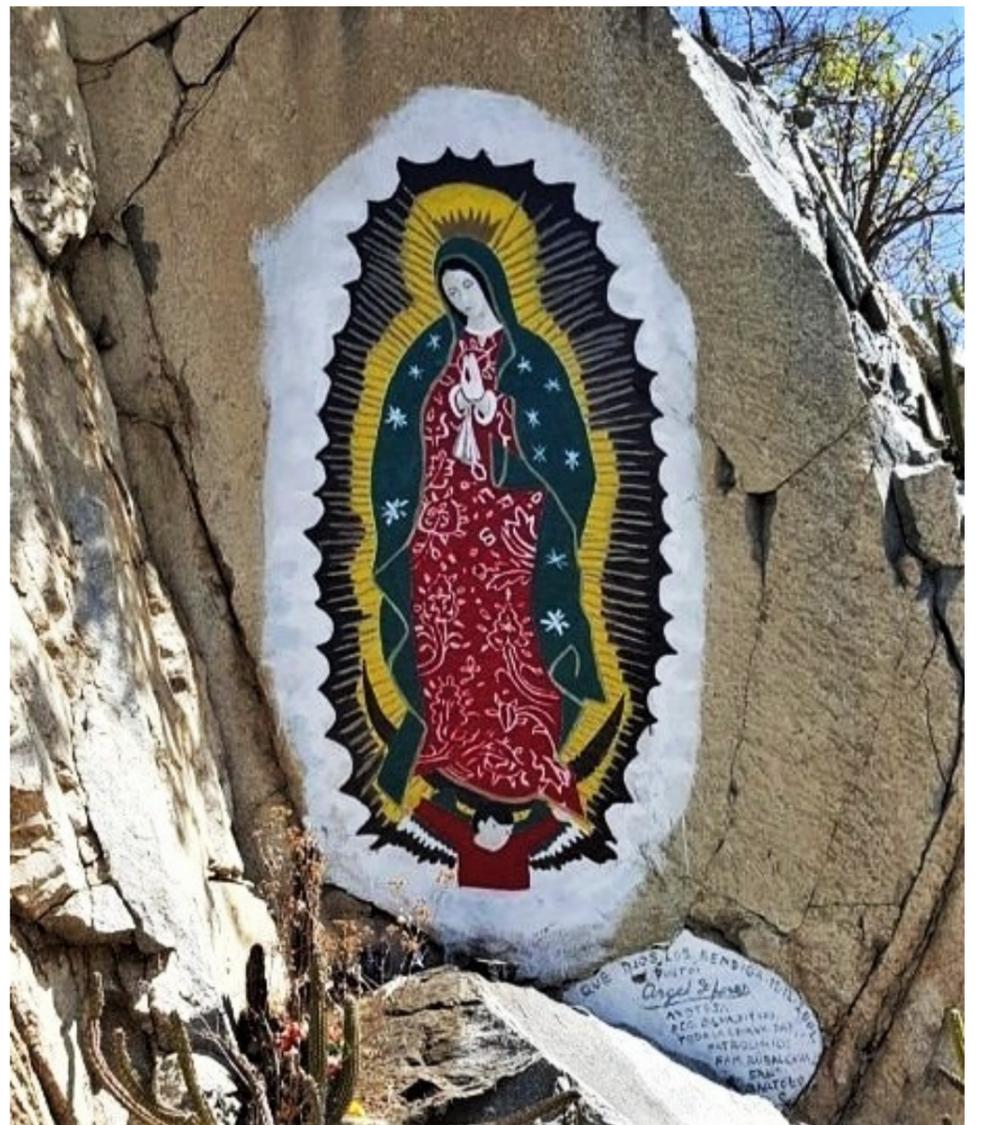
...Sierra de la Laguna



Church in El Rosario, BCS



Above: Roof view, Del and Donna's



Right: Virgin of Guadalupe, Hwy 1 San Bartolo, BCS



Submitted by
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by Tommy Clarkson

Angel Wing Begonia *Begonia Hybrid*

Family *Begoniaceae*

Also known as Cane Begonia

(If ever there were a contest to find the most lop-sided leaves on a plant, this might well be a good contender. However, this uniqueness notwithstanding, with delicate, year-round "flowers" of red, pink or white, it has some delightful features!)

But, let's first, briefly, discuss the *Begoniaceae* family. As some psychologist must have surely said, "To know the family, and from whence one came, is to better understand the individual."

(Gee, that sounds rather profound!) Well, *Begoniaceae* is comprised of two genera of tropical perennial herbs that range from shrubs to climbers. All told, there are somewhere between 900 to, perhaps, 2000 species – *makes for huge reunions!* Striving, in their own way, to be botanically, politically correct, their flowers are usually unisexual. . . *and if that whole issue confuses you, welcome to my world!*

In a bit of "scientific talk," Kirsten Albrecht Llamas says in her book "Tropical Flowering Plants, A Guide to Identification and Cultivation," their leaves are "subobovate to obliquely ovate, often with zones of dark red, pink, and green, (with) colored veins, often covered with glistening scales and/or hairs' margins sometimes fringed (fimbriate), (with the stems) covered with hairs." *No, this will not be on the test!*



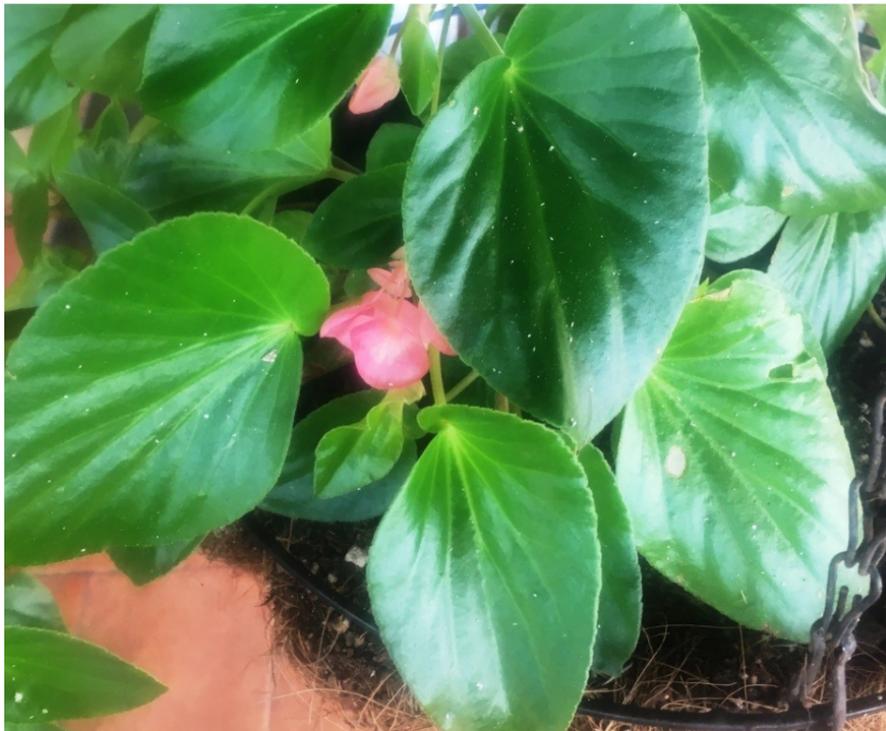
As mentioned, there are numerous variants of this attractive plant

Nellie Neal, another smart lady, wrote about the "wings" of this somewhat different appearing plant - in her fun book, "Gardener's Guide to Tropical Plants." She said that, appropriate to its name, "The leaves are wing-shaped, sometimes elongated, almost ridiculously, to climax in deep points. The rounded leaf top edges are elegantly draped, sometimes cupped or serrated along the edges, and often splattered with accent colors.

They look slightly bizarre but effortlessly charming (with) many shades of green but also bronze and shades of red spread warmly on the undersides. . . each inflorescent has a pendant-shaped bract that opens up like a locket to reveal tiny white flowers. "

There are some who assert that the Angel Wing Begonia was first hybridized in Brazil. Other sources state such was initially done by California plant breeder Eva Kenworthy Gray in 1926. I suspect one or the other – if not both – accomplished this with a cross between *Begonia aconitifolia* and *B. coccinea*. However, the hybrids take on an array of different appearances. Some leaves are spotted, some not. But, a rather interesting aspect of these is that, with a sweet, tart taste, the "flowers" are edible!

...Angel Wing Begonia



Wow, is that a lopsided leaf or what?



This one asserted itself to be a bush, not a vine!

Whatever its genesis, they prefer to grow in a shady to partially shading locale outdoors or in a bright, humid, indoor location. Out, surrounded by nature, Angel Wing Begonias like filtered/dappled shade and will well enjoy early morning or late afternoon sun. Of the "sensitive sort," they will burn if grown in direct mid-day sun.

We've one hanging in a coconut fiber (coir or fibre de coco) basket on the northeast side of our dining *palapa*. In plant "adulthood," they may reach one to four feet (30 cm - 1.22 meters) in both height and width. Despising drought - during which its cane will collapse - it requires regular watering and wants a good dose of balanced fertilizer regularly. Otherwise, this lovely hybridized species is easy to grow in richly organic, well-drained soil. Those clusters of flowers are at the end of its leaf axils (The upper angle at which a leaf joins its stem) on waxy stems. These are found to be tasty by mealybugs and aphids so watch for them.

There are a couple of ways to propagate these - both from stem or tip cuttings. The first is the simplest. Merely place a stem with two or three leaves into water and ask it nicely to

please root. The second is only slightly more complicated. First, cut a two-leaf section of the stem four to six inches (10.16-15.24 cm) from the end; peel off the lower leaves; dip the lower stem end in rooting powder; insert about two inches (5.1 cm) into potting soil; and finally moisten the entirety of the soil. In about a week, pull gently on your plant and if it holds, it has rooted. At this point you may wish to move it to a larger, regular pot.

We have three specimens. Two appear to be identical except the one in the *palapa* presents itself as a vine, while another, further down in the gardens, has decided it would rather be a bush! *I suppose every family has one or two within it that just wish to be different!*

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you can reach Tommy Clarkson at tommy@manzanillosun.com

Cuetzalan, Puebla

places the editors have been and recommend you visit

Cuetzalan (Spanish: [kwetsa'lan]) is a small town set high in the hills in the north of the Mexican state of Puebla, 183 kilometres (114 mi) from Puebla, the state capital. Franciscan friars founded the town in 1547.

Cuetzalan is located in the Sierra Norte region. The climate is warm and humid due to the elevation of 900-1000 meters and proximity to the Gulf of Mexico. The town itself is characterized by sloping cobbled streets and numerous rustic buildings. It serves as the municipal seat for the surrounding municipality of Cuetzalan del Progreso. Cuetzalan was named a "Pueblo Mágico" in 2002.



Yohualichan site stairs

The town center is composed largely of handicraft markets as well as numerous stalls selling every-day necessities. As a tourist attraction, the town also has a few bars, restaurants and nightclubs. Getting to Cuetzalan from Puebla takes around four hours. The best route to get there is by getting a coach from the central bus depot in Puebla.

One of the main attractions of the town is La Cascada de las Brisas, a waterfall located within the jungle surrounding the town. There are some open back jeeps that can be taken to the end of the road where a trail begins through the jungle to the pool at the bottom of the waterfall.



Cuetzalan cathedral

There are countless other waterfalls in the jungle and coffee plantations surrounding the town. Many can be seen by taking the walking paths east, all the way to Papantla, in the State of Veracruz, (a long two- to three-day hike). Upon crossing the river which marks the state boundary of Veracruz and Puebla, the culture and language changes to Totonac.

The town also features a large network of caves. In 2004, a group of British cavers became trapped in the caves and were stuck for several days. Upon being rescued, it turned out that some of them were military personnel. Since the Mexican government had not been informed of the presence of foreign military personnel (although the Mexican military had), they were expelled, causing brief diplomatic friction between the two countries.

It is important to note that these caves are potentially very dangerous and the only reason the 2004 expedition did not suffer the loss of six lives during the flood is that the team was made up of experienced cavers who were well prepared and knew the cave systems intimately, some of them having been involved in exploration in Cuetzalan for 15 years.

XECTZ-AM, a government-run indigenous community radio station that broadcasts in Nahuatl and Totonac, is based in Cuetzalan.

Image and story source: Wikimedia



by Tommy Clarkson

Snow Bush *Breynia disticha* 'Roseo-picta'

Family *Phyllanthaceae*

Also known as Red-leafed Snow Bush, Redleaf Breynia, Leaf Flower, Hawaiian Snow Bush, Snow-on-the-Mountain, Sweetpea Bush or Ice Cream Bush

The genus *Breynia* is comprised of evergreen trees and shrubs from tropical forests and scrub areas of Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands, including the Aloha State, Hawaii.

At the outset, let's differentiate between the two, somewhat similar, varieties of this delightful species, '*Atropurpurea*' and '*Roseapicta*'. The former has dark purple leaves, while this has mottled creamy white, pink and green variegation on its approximately one-inch (2.54 cm) oval leaves, with attractive red zigzag stems and red petioles. Both are a wonderful all-season source of color.

The tiny flowers, of both species – which are followed by small berries - generally go unnoticed. I wish I could recall where I found this description of the Snow Bush and profusely apologize to whomever said it for my non-attribution to them, "It's almost as if a watercolorist dappled each leaf with drops and blushes of color. It is bushy and upright, graceful and open."

The Snow Bush is native to New Caledonia and Vanuatu in the western Pacific and it's a rather apt name for this beautiful, smallish tropical shrub - though few native folks in those two locales have probably ever actually seen snow! The name is derived from the white coloration of its new growth. But, just like many a tourist to our tropics, when it gets a good dose of sustained sun, the young white leaves will turn to various shades



If you squint your eyes and turn your head just so, it does rather look like snow on those leaves!

of pink. Generally speaking, it is used as a specimen plant or placed in the garden as an accent what with its delightful coloration. Some shear it and grow it as ground cover or as a bedding plant.

In more tropical areas, such as ours, it is often used as a hedge. Well taken care of, in maturity, the Snow Bush should grow anywhere in the four to ten foot (1.22 – 3.05 meters) in height range with a spread of eight feet (2.44 meters). Once new growth appears, one will observe branches with leaves that are mostly green - rather than variegated.

I'd encourage their removal as they, with the extra chlorophyll, will enlarge and grow faster than those on the rest of the plant. (*Nifty nugget of knowledge: This applies to all variegated plants.*) There is, by the way a small, leafed variety of this tropical shrub, called 'Minima.'

It can handle either full sun or partial shade, but develops its best foliage color in the former. Beyond that, from what I have observed, it has no serious insect or disease problems (though you might wish to keep an eye out for spider mites). Back to those bugs!

While researching the *Breynia disticha*, I came across an article stating that it can be a host plant for the Snowbush Caterpillar, which will evolve into the White-tipped Black Moth. Apparently, this velvety black moth is rather unique in that, unlike most nocturnal moths, it is active during the day. While I have never seen such, apparently these caterpillars can become pests and may require control to prevent them from making a meal of your plant!

...Snow Bush



A person has to admit, this is an attractive bush.

Its maintenance requirements are few. They do well in well-draining soil – preferably organically rich with regular watering. Periodic light pruning during the growing season stimulates new foliage growth.

Additionally, one may well wish to pinch off the stem tips when they are young in order to promote branching growth. At the other end of the plant, the Snow Bush can sucker profusely and if it escapes from cultivation may spread, vegetatively, via root suckers.

For folks who would like to have one in the more four-seasonal climes, in the winter, the *Breynea disticha* will attain a semi-dormant state—as do I in such conditions - and can lose half of its leaves. This startles and worries some, but curb those desires to over-water or prune it.



Though this one is still young and thriving in a pot, the Snowbush can grow anywhere from four to ten feet!

Wait until early spring and then prune off a third of each branch, feed it some with high-nitrogen fertilizer and provide it with bright, but not full – sun. Actually, partial shade would probably be best. With such actions, new growth and more colorful leaves will soon emerge.

Lastly, for those into etymology or botanical trivia, its genus name honors Jacob Breyne (1637-1697) who was a merchant in the Polish city of Danzig – called by some, Gdańsk - and his son Johann Philipp Breyne (1680-1764), a physician in the same city.

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Chiles en Nogada

Ingredients

- ✓ 10 Poblano peppers, roasted, with skin and seeds removed.

For the Filling

- ✓ 1/4 lb ground beef
- ✓ 1/4 lb ground pork
- ✓ 1 cup tomato sauce
- ✓ 1 white onion diced
- ✓ 5 cloves garlic
- ✓ 1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
- ✓ 3 black peppercorns
- ✓ 1/4 tsp ground cloves
- ✓ 1/2 tsp dry thyme
- ✓ 1 tsp salt
- ✓ 1 tsp sugar
- ✓ 1/2 large apple diced
- ✓ 1/2 pear diced
- ✓ 1 peach diced
- ✓ 1/2 ripe plantain diced
- ✓ 1/4 cup raisins
- ✓ 1 tsp olive oil

For the Salsa de Nogada

- ✓ 2 cups walnuts or almonds
- ✓ 1/2 cup milk
- ✓ 3 oz goat cheese or cream cheese
- ✓ 1 tbsp sugar
- ✓ salt to taste
- ✓ Decoration
- ✓ Chopped Parsley
- ✓ Pomegranate seeds

Directions

For the Salsa de Nogada

1. Start by putting the almonds or walnuts in hot water for about 20 minutes. This is so that it is easier to remove the skins, resulting in a white salsa.
2. Once you have removed the skins, put the almonds or walnuts in cool water for 15 more minutes.
3. Add the almonds or walnuts to the rest of the salsa ingredients, and blend until smooth. Set aside.



For the Filling

1. Start by sautéing half of the onion, the peppercorns and the garlic in a frying pan with the olive oil for a couple of minutes.
2. Next, add the above to a blender with the tomato sauce, the thyme, and the cloves and blend until smooth.
3. In the same pan where you sautéed the onions and garlic, add the rest of the onion, the ground meat and the salt and cook until the meat is cooked through.
4. Add the fruits and cook for an additional 5 minutes.
5. Add the cinnamon and sugar, stir, and cook for 3 more minutes over medium-low heat.
6. Add the tomato sauce mixture from above and let simmer until almost all of the liquid has evaporated. Remember that the meat shouldn't be dry, but it shouldn't have too much liquid either, because that will make it harder to fill the poblano peppers later.

To Make the Chiles Rellenos

1. Once the meat and salsa are ready, add some of the filling to each cleaned and prepared poblano pepper. In order to do this, cut an opening right down the middle. You can also use toothpicks to close it back up if you desire.
2. Smother in the salsa, and top with parsley and pomegranate seeds.

Source [My Latina Table](#)

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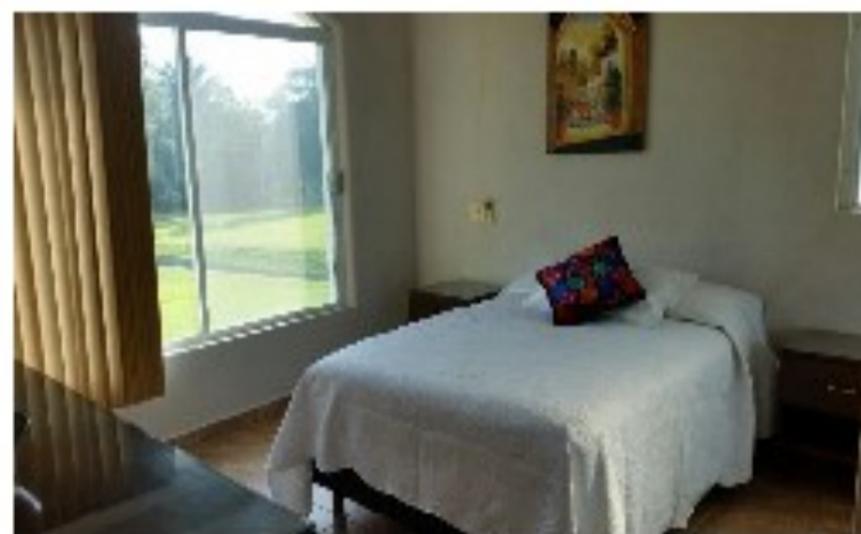
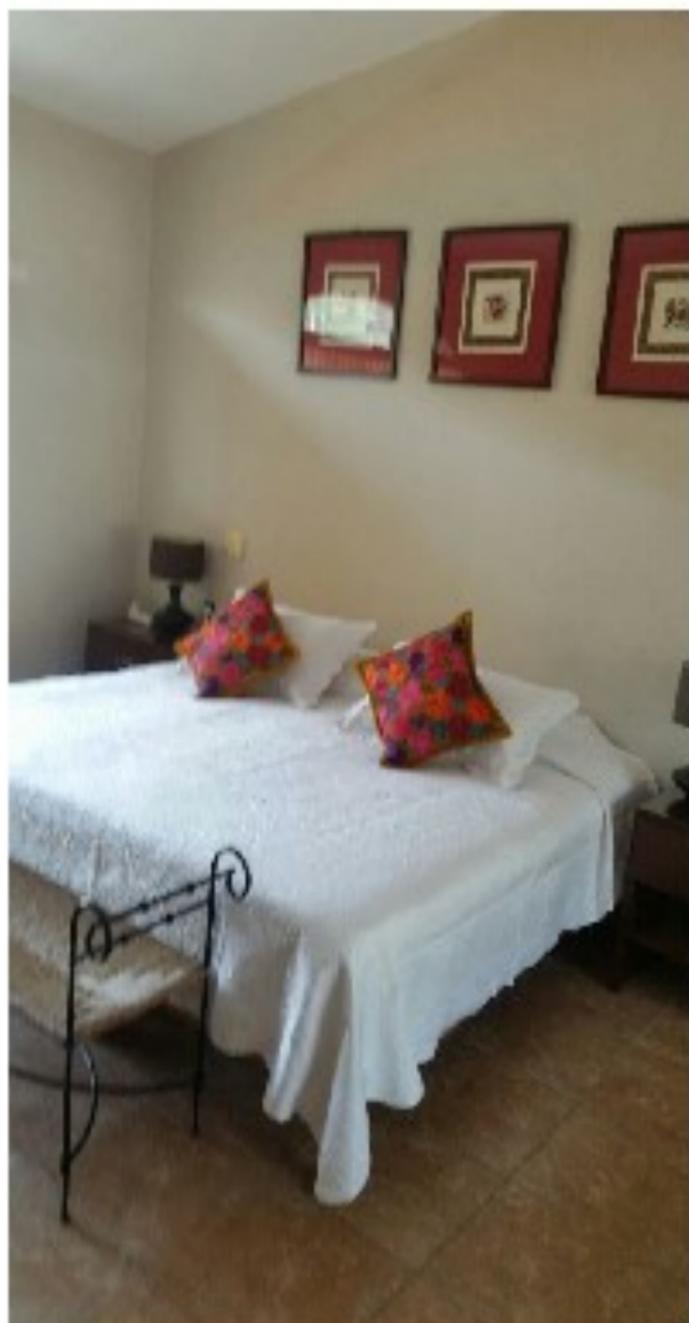
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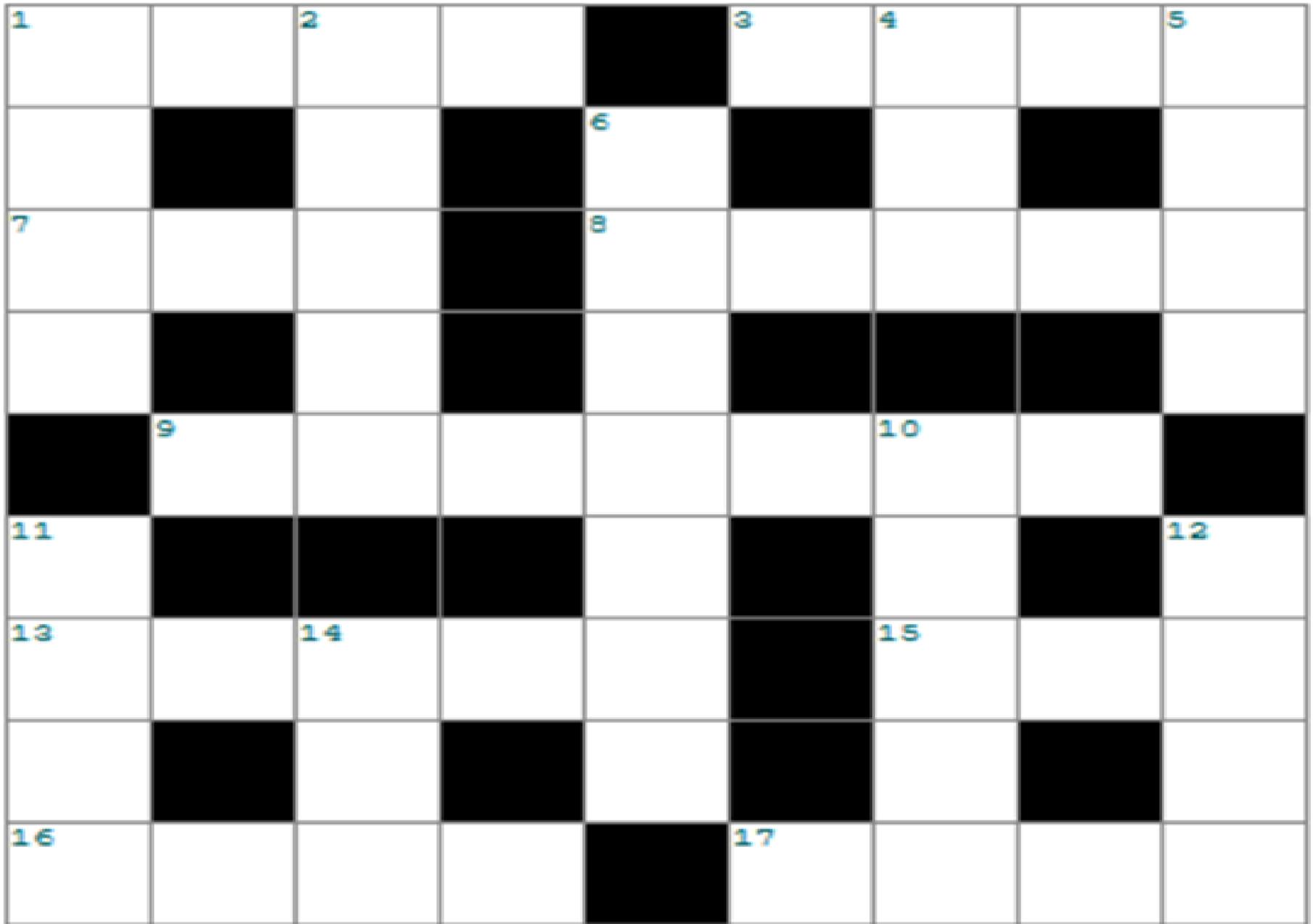
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Crossword

solution posted in next month's edition



Across

- 1 sum
- 3 country
- 7 (it) falls
- 8 to bring
- 9 (you/tú) dreamed
- 13 (you/tú) heard
- 15 (she) loved
- 16 other; another
- 17 zero

Down

- 1 dry
- 2 fear
- 4 wing
- 5 (I) will be
- 6 again, another time (4,3)
- 10 (I) brought
- 11 mud
- 12 how, to what degree
- 14 to be

Last month's crossword solution:



lexisrex.com

Chiles en Nogada

from the Path to Citizenship series

Chiles en Nogada is a very famous Mexican dish that exemplifies the art of cooking in Mexico and highlights the food culture of the rich nation. If you have a chance to taste this dish, you certainly should. Here is some of the history behind it.

This dish was invented by nuns in Puebla, Mexico, in 1821. It was made to present to the visiting Mexican Army General, Agustín de Iturbide. He was involved in a decisive battle to gain control of Mexico City and win the Mexican War of Independence. He had just signed the Treaty of Cordoba which gave Mexico its independence in Veracruz and was on his way back to Mexico City. He was passing through Puebla and the residents presented this meal to him. This is why this dish is so closely tied to the Mexican Independence Day.

This dish has the red, green and white of the Mexican flag which also makes this a patriotic dish. Coincidentally enough, Agustín de Iturbide is credited with creating the Mexican flag.

What is Chiles en Nogada?

Chiles - Poblano peppers are used. They are like a dark, green pepper and not spicy. En or (in) nogada (actually is walnut or walnut sauce).

The peppers are stuffed with a ground meat that is usually beef and/or pork along with dried fruits like raisins and nuts. The dried fruit adds a little sweetness to the dish. The sauce is a cream sauce with pureed walnuts in it. It is topped off with pomegranate seeds.

This dish is really wonderful when prepared correctly. This is an incredibly complex dish and, of course, there are shortcuts. When the pepper is cooked with the filling and it is soft enough to cut with a fork, and when the sauce has the taste of walnuts and quality ingredients are used, it is an incredibly complex-tasting dish where you can savor the individual flavors. When is Chiles en Nogada eaten?

This dish is, traditionally, served in August and September because it is the season for walnuts and pomegranates. Nowadays, fruits and nuts are available year round and this dish can be made at any time of the year. You will see it as a special sometimes in a restaurant but generally the aforementioned months are the best time because it is made special for the season.

Article and image source: [Everything Playa del Carmen](https://www.everythingplayadelcarmen.com)

