Fall is a good time to plant trees and shrubs in Hill Country yards. The Operation NICE! (Natives Instead of the Common Exotics!) recommendation for November is the Anacacho orchid-tree (*Bauhinia lunarioides*). This small tree or shrub is the miniaturized Texas version of the large-flowered Asian orchid-trees widely grown throughout the US Gulf Coast and other warm areas of the world.

Our native orchid-tree is becoming more and more popular as a landscape plant, and so it is increasingly more available in Texas nurseries. I think it must be more cold-tolerant than the several Asian species cultivated in warm parts of Texas. Native-plant horticulturist Jill Nokes (“How to Grow Native Plants of Texas and the Southwest”) claims the Anacacho orchid-tree can be cultivated as far north as the Dallas area, especially where planted in southern exposures.

In Texas, the orchid-tree grows naturally south and west of Uvalde in only three counties, Val Verde, Kinney, and Maverick. It is named for the Anacacho Mountains of Kinney County, where those “mountains” are really limestone hills and canyons. This species also is found in northeastern Mexico, where some do grow in true mountains.

Anacacho orchid-tree, a member of the legume family, has small light-green leaves that are divided into two leaflets fused at the base. Each leaf has the outline of a cloven hoof. Mexican names for this plant are pata de vaca (cow hoof) and pata de cabra (goat hoof).

During the spring, orchid-trees have showy tight clusters of small white flowers. The old species name *congesta* refers to the crowded blooms. Flowers have five petals and 9 or 10 long stamens. Some people think these look like small orchid flowers.

Several years ago, not long after I first learned about Anacacho orchid-trees, I was in the Sierra Madre Oriental looking at some geology on the road to Rayones in the state of Nuevo Leon. I was surprised to see a *Bauhinia* with deep-pink flowers growing along the roadside. I thought all flowers of the Anacacho orchid-tree are white!

When I returned home, I learned that lots of people knew about the pink varieties and wanted them for their yards. Since that time, we visited Yucca Do Nursery northwest of Houston and bought a pink-blooming orchid-tree collected along that same road to Rayones.

The first orchid-tree we bought 8 or 9 years ago was propagated from seed by Chuck Janzow. It is now about 10 feet high and 6 feet wide, and it blooms profusely every spring. Some years there also is a less-spectacular fall bloom.

Judging from where it grows naturally, the Anacacho orchid-tree is drought-resistant and prefers well-drained calcareous soil. Our orchid-trees are planted in well-drained and sunny spots. Of course, I have to water them regularly the first couple of summers to get them well established. However, it’s been many years since I watered our oldest orchid-tree at all. It’s a tough little tree.

Some people say the *Bauhinia* is deer-resistant. I don’t know if our subdivision deer munch on orchid-trees, because ours are caged. Even if the deer don’t browse orchid-trees, these plants are just the right size for rutting bucks to batter with their antlers. And in our neighborhood, November is the prime time for bucks to do battle with shrubs and trees. I’ll cage any Anacacho orchid-tree I plant in our yard.