

**Draft Key to the *Malacothamnus* (Malvaceae) of  
Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Kern Counties, CA  
by Keir Morse  
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Comments, corrections, and questions welcome at [kmorse@rsabg.org](mailto:kmorse@rsabg.org)

1. Calyx bracts  $\leq 1/3$  (rarely to  $1/2$ ) calyx length; calyx lobes  $\leq$  tube, length generally  $\pm 1.5 \times$  width; plants generally 1-5 m tall
2. Stem hairs spreading and obvious to the naked eye; leaf blade 5–20 cm long, thick, upper surface generally densely hairy; branches generally stout ..... *M. davidsonii*
- 2' Stem hairs minute, not or barely distinguishable to the naked eye; leaf blade generally 2–6 cm long, thin, upper surface generally green, sparsely hairy; branches generally slender ..... *M. fasciculatus*
- 1' Calyx bracts generally  $\geq 1/2$  calyx length; calyx lobes  $\pm =$  to  $\gg$  tube, length generally  $1.5\text{--}5 \times$  width; plants rarely  $> 2$  m tall
3. Buds clearly pointed; leaves and infl often somewhat sticky due to glandular hairs; leaves truncate to cordate at base ..... *M. marrubioides*
- 3' Buds generally rounded to slightly pointed; leaves and infl generally not sticky; leaves cordate at base ..... *M. orbiculatus*

Notes:

- This key was developed for the San Gabriel Mountains, so might not work as well outside of that area.
- Calyx bracts are a whorl of three bracts beneath each calyx.
- See photos below. Addition photos on Calphotos website.

*Malacothamnus davidsonii*

- Los Angeles County
- Occasionally hybridizes with *M. fasciculatus*.

*Malacothamnus fasciculatus*

- Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties
- Plants in this area have historically been included in *M. f.* var. *laxiflorus* which is currently (and probably incorrectly) lumped under *M. f.* var. *fasciculatus*.
- Intergrades with *M. orbiculatus* where ranges come together.
- Occasionally hybridizes with *M. davidsonii* and possibly with *M. marrubioides*.
- If recognized, *M. parishii* from the city of San Bernardino (presumed extinct) has cuneate leaf bases and leaves with parallel sides.

*Malacothamnus marrubioides*

- Los Angeles County (possibly Kern County)
- Occasionally hybridizes with *M. orbiculatus* and possibly with *M. fasciculatus*.

*Malacothamnus orbiculatus*

- Los Angeles, Kern, and San Bernardino Counties
- Includes plants sometimes lumped in *M. fremontii* which only occurs north of Kern County.
- Intergrades with *M. fasciculatus* and occasionally hybridizes with *M. marrubioides*.



*M. davidsonii* (left two), *M. fasciculatus* (right)



*M. davidsonii* (left), *M. fasciculatus* (right)



*M. davidsonii* (bottom), *M. fasciculatus* (top left), hybrid (top right)

Note hairs longer in *M. davidsonii* than *M. fasciculatus*.



*M. orbiculatus* calyces and buds. Highly variable.



*M. marrubioides* calyx and buds. Note long calyx bracts and very pointed buds.



Some *M. orbiculatus* might key to *M. davidsonii* but see typical growth form of each.  
*M. orbiculatus* (left), *M. davidsonii* (right)