



One in a series.....

Aquilegia longissima

Aquilegia longissima, the long-spur columbine, is a rare perennial herb that is native to northern Mexico, Trans-Pecos Texas and southern Arizona. In the original species description by Asa Gray in 1883. *Aquilegia longissima* is distinguished from the shorter-spurred golden columbine *Aquilegia chrysantha* based on the extremely long spur over 10 cm long, narrow spatulate petals, and very slender spurs that usually hang straight down. The plants typically flower in the fall after monsoon rains and are found in oak-pine-juniper woodlands in shaded canyons near intermittent streams or on talus slopes. (Wikipedia)



My first conscious awareness of flowering plants possibly began with the genus *Aquilegia* or as they are commonly called columbine. I can recall in the vague quite distant past of visiting my great grandmother Walton in Monticello, Utah with my parents. It was summer time when she took my mom and I around to the back of her house and all against the very back of it was an enormous bed of columbines (she had collected the initial plants from

the Abajo [Blue] Mountains that the city sits astride of on its eastern flank) ... a giant swath of two or three feet wide (an enormous amount for only one species). Obviously she loved them!

Becoming increasingly interested in native plants while living in Texas,

my awareness of columbines had been heavily influenced by both my plant loving mother and her family in Monticello as I've just described.

I had been planning a trip to the Big Bend of far west Texas which created a chance to think about anything I might want to collect seed or frankly just to be aware of what I was even looking at. At some point I was reading about various plants in the Big Bend Park when I noticed a comment about where a rare columbine could be found. It noted it was located up *Pine Canyon* at the very base of it's seasonal waterfall. To shorten this story, I drove to this rather remote location and then hiked the final three or four miles along a dry creek bed until I indeed located some scattered plants (out of bloom) with noticeable seed pods (an eureka moment to be sure) just at the base of that waterfall.

Fast forward to where upon successfully raising some plants, I sent a few out to my mother to try. Shockingly for me, the plants did much, much better in Holbrook than in the muggy humid confines of my Dallas garden. Years later my brother Jay who shares a love of these sorts of things, aquired plants/seeds from these very same plants and has been nurturing them on his property in Shumway, Arizona. After moving back to Arizona I visited his yard and immediately needed seed. So to make a short story even shorter, these are from my original collecton done in the late 1970's. An amazing plant and as lovely a columbine as was ever created.



Almost like dancing fairies, their elegant long spurs seem to have a hypnotic appearance as they waffle and dance around in the breeze.....

