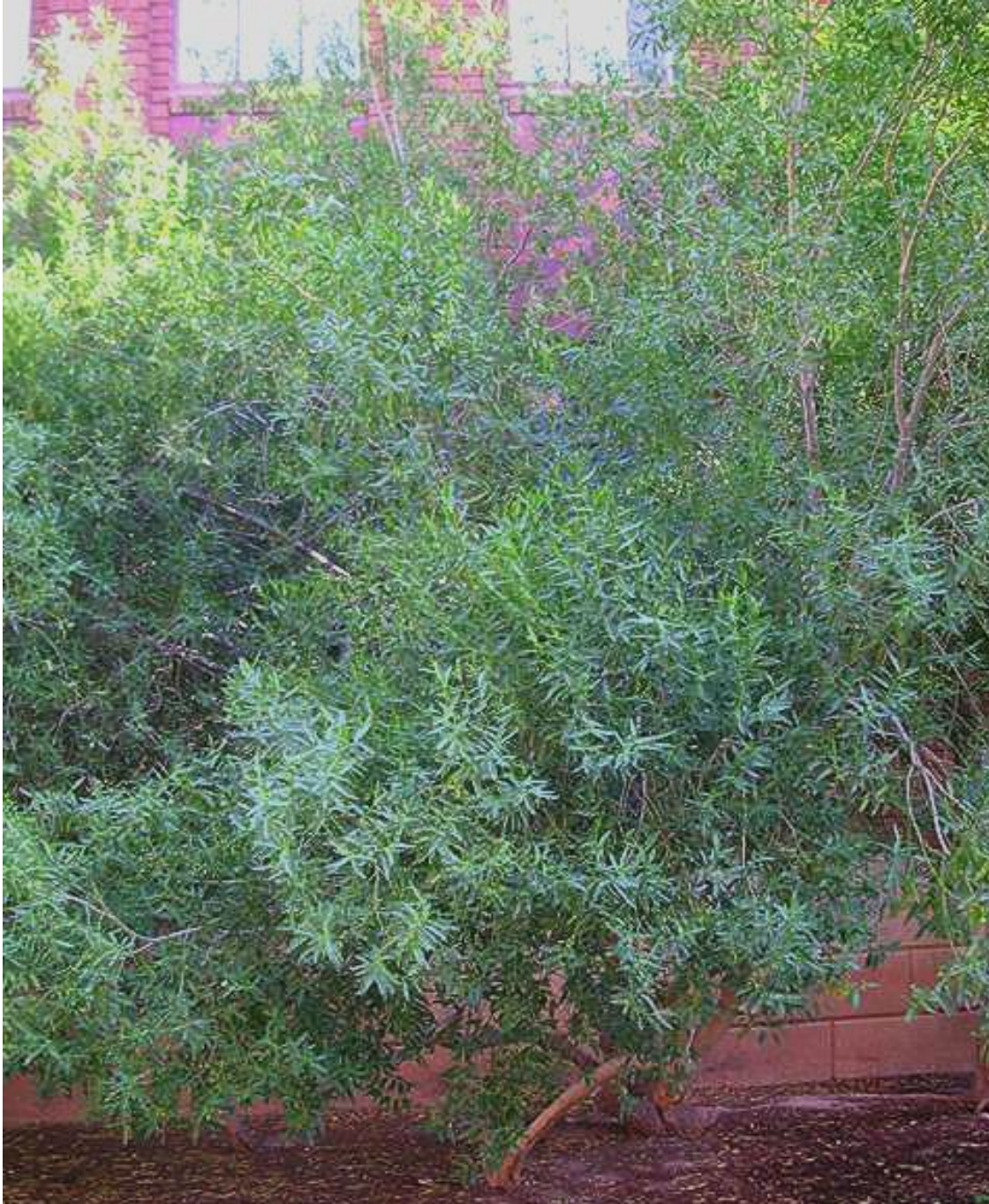


CAMPUS ARBORETUM



Focus on:
Vallesia glabra
"pearl berry"
Apocynaceae



While it is really a completely unassuming 20-foot-tall, broadleaf evergreen with glossy green lance-shaped leaves, this tree stopped me in my tracks. I suppose in some ways it could be mistaken for any species of tree "that doesn't belong here"...certainly not a sage-green compound leaf tree we usually expect in the desert. It also wasn't the flowers that caught my attention - they bloom from October to May but are odorless, inconspicuous, white -green clusters. What caught my attention this time, was what looked like a **confetti of pearls dripping from the entire canopy**. Indeed, its common name was found to be "pearl berry" - known scientifically as *Vallesia glabra*. The white, translucent fruits are drupes, oblong in shape and about 1/2 in length with one internal seed in view through the fleshy fruit.

To learn more, visit this Campus Arboretum Species Description Page found at: <https://apps.cals.arizona.edu/arboretum/taxon.aspx?id=714>



While everything about the appearance was charming from the green canopy, those white jeweled fruit and even the contrast of the orange-tan rough, fissured bark of the trunk...it was the history of this plant that left me feeling thankful to have noticed this tree! Pearl berry is widespread throughout the subtropical and tropical areas of the New World, extending from Mexico to northern South America, at elevations of approximately sea level to about 1650 feet (1,4). It is highly adaptable to also well travelled as colonies also appear in Florida, the West Indies, Baja California, and the Galápagos Islands. Its northern limit is the Sonoran Desert, where it inhabits washes, canyons, and plains (4). It can also be found in forests, margins of sand dunes and lava flows, along ridges, and in riparian and semi-riparian areas Though the Sonoran Desert marks its northern limit, it is widely adaptable to a variety of water, light, soil, and heat, it is a good choice for southwestern gardens if some thought is given to its protection from winter temperatures below 23°F.



Native people throughout the Sonoran Desert and further into Mexico and South America, eat the fleshy fruit raw. The English botanist Edward Palmer likened their flavor to lychee fruit. The plant has also been used in traditional medicines in numerous countries from North- to Central- and South America repeatedly citing benefit in the treatment of indigestion, ulcers and heart-burn, eye inflammation, eye infections, skin rashes, and even measles as well as other inflammatory conditions including rheumatism, and muscle aches. Modern research conducted in Peru confirms that extracts from *Vallesia glabra* have fungicidal properties that may be able to protect other plants.



Given its status in traditional medicine, it is no surprise to also learn that the plant is also associated with various cultural and religious practices, to ward off spells or infections from the dead or to prevent ethereal pathogens from entering sores or lesions. It is also not surprising to learn that Kew Royal Botanical Gardens has placed *Vallesia glabra* on a list of priority species to use in the restoration of biodiversity of the dry forests of southern Peru.



and understand trees! The health of the planet and our fellow humans depends on respectful and understanding tree selection choices. I hope you're inspired to deepen the connection by visiting campus. and using the [interactive arboretum map](#) to find the tree featured in this spotlight for a more immersive education and sensory experience.



Enjoy!

Tanya

Tanya M. Quist, Ph.D.
Director, University of Arizona Campus Arboretum

UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA CAMPUS ARBORETUM

P.O. Box 210036 Tucson, AZ 85721-0036

PHONE: (520) 621-1582

E-MAIL: infoarboretum@ag.arizona.edu

WEBSITE: <http://arboretum.arizona.edu>



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