

CAMPUS ARBORETUM



Focus on:
Parkinsonia praecox
"palo brea"
Fabaceae



Palo brea is small but majestic, semi-evergreen tree with a loose,

spreading, umbrella-shaped canopy and a distinctive branching structure. The lime green bark on the trunks and stems along with seasonally available leaves allow it to carry out photosynthesis year-round. The waxy coating on the bark not only reduces water loss and reflects light but it adds even more drama to the already interesting multi-trunk architecture of the tree. Further, the branches extended from bold, waxy green geometry provide contrast as they are somewhat pendulous with minute, delicate, compound leaves. Because it is the earliest bloomer of the trees in the Sonoran Desert it earned its common name: "palo" meaning "stick" and "brea" meaning "early". It is usually found inspiring desert dwellers with yellow masses of flowers borne on axillary clusters from April to June.

Its wide distribution range from Sonora and extending south into Guatemala Venezuela, Ecuador, Venezuela, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru and Argentina is evidence of its terrific adaptation to an array of environmental factors! *Parkinsonia praecox*, does however hybridize readily with other *Parkinsonia* species making it difficult to find one that is genetically true from seed. Further, while most species in this botanical family form a symbiotic relationship with soil microbes to fix nitrogen from the soil, this species is said to be devoid of such a relationship :(

To learn more, visit this Campus Arboretum Species Description Page found at: <https://apps.cals.arizona.edu/arboretum/taxon.aspx?id=68>



(Above) Pinnately compound leaves have transient stipular spines...making them friendly much of the year.

Ethnobotanical Uses:

Palo brea is prized as a landscape ornamental tree, for habitat, and for

commercial products made from its waxy bloom. This waxy is scraped off and melted into a "gum" called "brea" which is used as a glue for leather objects and furniture. The wax contains 80% arabin, is completely water soluble in water and is used as a substitute for gum Arabic in food. The tree gum is also used to make soap by dissolving it in an alkali.



Rods of yellow flowering stems arrive in early spring.



With good pruning, the cool geometric architecture of the tree is featured.

(Below) The thick coat of wax on the bark gives the trunks an ethereal appearance.



Thanks for joining me on my journey to see 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!

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