

# Arid Zone Trees



## **Pithecellobium mexicanum** *Mexican Ebony*



### **Horticultural Qualities** **Pithecellobium mexicanum** *Mexican Ebony*

**Foliage:** Deciduous  
**Mature Height:** 15' - 20'  
**Mature Width:** 10' - 15'  
**Growth Rate:** Fast  
**Hardiness:** 15 degrees F  
**Exposure:** Full Sun  
**Leaf Color:** Green  
**Shade:** Filtered  
**Flower Color:** Cream  
**Flower Shape:** Ball  
**Flower Season:** Spring  
**Thorns:** Yes  
**Box Sizes Produced:** 24"  
**Propagation Method:** Seed

[www.aridzonetrees.com](http://www.aridzonetrees.com)

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# Pithecellobium mexicanum

## *Mexican Ebony*

Combining the growth rate and adaptability of Thornless Mesquites and the structure and appearance of the Desert Ironwood, *Mexican Ebony (Pithecellobium mexicanum)* is a versatile and underutilized desert landscape tree. With small gray-green leaflets, an open canopy and smooth, chalky gray trunks, its appearance mimics Desert Ironwood. The growth rate approaches that of Thornless Mesquite. In warm microclimates, it retains most of its foliage, through the desert winter months. The lacy leaf canopy, smooth, curving, chalky gray trunks make Mexican Ebony, also called Palo Chino, a tree that can substitute for or be inter-planted with Ironwoods. Unlike Ironwoods, it can be planted in a wide variety of landscape settings including turf areas or mixed with under-story plantings that require regular, year round irrigation.

The tree is native to the Mexican states of Sonora, Sinaloa and southern Baja. In natural settings trees are found growing in arroyos, desert slopes and valley floors. They cannot be naturalized in desert landscape settings and will require some summer irrigation. Both the small leaflets and immature bark are a pale gray-green. The bark fissures and darkens slightly as trunks and branches mature. It is hardy to 15 F and armed with small cat-claw like thorns. Cream colored blooms appear in March and April with 1 to 3 inches long, thick brown pods maturing by mid-summer. In the desert, trees mature to about 20' tall and 15' wide. In landscape settings, with the benefit of regular irrigation, fertilization and well-drained soils, they may grow larger.

Mexican Ebony provides filtered shade that is ideal for promoting the growth and flowering of under-story plantings. With its striking color and form it can be used as an accent tree, at entry monuments or any application where Ironwoods would be attractive. They work well as a perimeter planting or as a transition tree from landscaped areas to undisturbed desert.

## Cultural Practices

Foster the development of a more dispersed root system and reduce the risk of wind throw by arranging irrigation emitters at varying distances from the trunk to encourage roots to "seek out" water and nutrients. Irrigation emitter arrangement along with other information on irrigations practices for desert trees can be found at [www.aridzonetrees.com](http://www.aridzonetrees.com) and click on the FAQ link.

Prune as needed to reinforce the structure and form of the tree. Periodic thinning is the most desirable method of pruning. Avoid hedging or heading back desert species, as this will only stimulate excessive branching. Do not remove more than 30% of the canopy during the summer as this can lead to sunburn injuries that can later be invaded by wood boring insects. Always use clean, sharp tools that are cleaned regularly in a 10% solution of bleach. For detail pruning guide see [www.aridzonetrees.com](http://www.aridzonetrees.com) and click on the FAQ interactive button.

Periodically insect pests can be a problem on some desert trees. On young trees, insect infestation can slow typical seasonal growth. Inspect trees during the growing season for common garden sucking insects such as aphids, thrip, whiteflies or psyllids. During dry months, (May and June) in dusty conditions, spider mites can appear. Monitor for infestation and apply controls as needed. Spray applications of water or water and Safer Soap give short-term control (3 to 7 days) for small insect population. For heavy infestation or longer control use federally registered insecticides. A contact insecticide application will kill existing adults. An application with a systemic soil drench will provide 8 to 12 weeks control for any post application insect hatchings or migration of insects. Before using pesticide for the first time or on new plants or cultivar, treat a few plants and check for phytotoxicity. **Always read label and follow label instruction before using pesticides. For pesticide control recommendations contact a licensed pest control advisor.**

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