

# Arid Zone Trees



*Sophora secundiflora*

Texas Mountain Laurel



## Horticultural Qualities

*Sophora secundiflora*  
Texas Mountain Laurel

**Foliage:** Evergreen

**Mature Height:** 15' - 20'

**Mature Width:** 8' - 10'

**Growth Rate:** Slow

**Hardiness:** 0 degrees F

**Exposure:** Full Sun

**Leaf Color:** Dark Green

**Shade:** Dense

**Flower Color:** Purple

**Flower Shape:** Funnel Shaped  
Petals

**Flower Season:** Spring

**Thorns:** None

**Propagation Method:** Seed

**Sizes Available:** 24"

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

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## *Sophora secundiflora* Texas Mountain Laurel

**Texas Mountain Laurel (*Sophora secundiflora*)** is used in most desert landscapes as a flowering, evergreen shrub. Of the four common names associated with this plant, *Sophora*, Texas Mountain Laurel, Frijolito and Mescal Bean, *Sophora* is the most widely used. Native to Texas, New Mexico and northeastern Mexico, *Sophoras* are well adapted to high temperatures, well drained alkaline soils and full sun. They typically grow quite slowly eventually reaching a mature height of 15 to 20 feet and 8 to 10 feet wide. Its slow rate of growth to mature height has led some to categorize it as a large shrub/small tree.

The form is usually low branching or multiple trunked with a dispersed to fairly dense canopy of glossy green leaves. In native settings they are found growing at elevations from 1000' to 5000'. *Sophoras* can be naturalized to survive on average annual rainfall alone in some desert settings. Supplemental summer irrigations are usually required in central and southern Arizona. The highest rate of growth is achieved on established *Sophoras* when they are planted in full sun and given deep, monthly irrigations during spring and summer. The leaves are compound (made up of smaller leaflets) with 7 to 9, round, 1 inch diameter leaflets. With proper pruning, *Sophoras* can be trained into the form of a small, multiple trunked tree. Be aware that excessive pruning can inhibit flower production, as *Sophora's* produce flowers only on one year old wood. Trunks range in color from dark gray to black.

Established plants are hardy to 0 degrees F. In March and April 4" to 8" bright purple, drooping clusters of wisteria-like flowers are produced. These flower clusters are very fragrant with a smell resembling grape soda. Flowers fade fairly quickly and by mid summer give rise to 3" to 4" fuzzy, tan, seed pods. The seeds are large, 3/8" to 1/2" diameter and dark orange in color. Seeds and flowers can be poisonous to children and pets. The risk is limited as the seed pod and seed coat are very hard and difficult to crack. Placement and maintenance of this shrub should take into account the risk posed by the flowers and seeds.

*Sophoras* can be used as individual flowering shrubs, in groupings to exploit the glossy green foliage, purple flowers and remarkable fragrance or as a screen or hedge planting. It mixes easily with other desert landscape plant materials and adds a unique color and texture to the landscape. It will tolerate planting in or near turf or in more native areas. *Sophoras* are thornless.

The only insect pest of any consequence is the larvae of the Pyralid Moth that feeds on leaves, young twig growth and immature seed pods. It is readily controlled by application of *Bacillus thuringiensis* (sometimes called BT), a widely available, commercial biological control agent. Sporadic availability and the relatively slow growth rate have limited the use and popularity of this shrub. Proper maintenance can enhance the growth and increase the popularity of this remarkable yet under-appreciated flowering desert shrub.

### *Cultural Practices*

Foster the development of a more dispersed root system and reduces 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.

**Seasonal Pruning:** Periodic thinning during the growing season is the most desirable method of pruning. Thin trees before the monsoon season to reduce wind damage to branches and uprooting of trees. Do not remove more than 30% of the canopy during the summer as this can lead to heavy flush growth and sunburn injuries that can later be invaded by wood boring insects. Avoid hedging or heading back desert species, as this will only stimulate excessive branching. For trees less than 7 years old, monthly light pruning (removal of no more than 20% to 30% of the leaf mass) during the growing season will keep the root to foliage mass ratio equal, not stimulate excessive flush growth, allow optimal photosynthesis to occur, initiate quicker root and tip branch growth, prevent sun burn injury and lessen the likelihood of wind damage. Always use clean, sharp tools that are regularly cleaned 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. 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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