



Parkinsonia aculeata Jerusalem-Thorn¹

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INTRODUCTION

Loose, flowing, delicate leaflets, a light, airy, low-branching growth habit with pendulous branch-tips, and a profusion of small, slightly fragrant, yellow blooms combine to create this popular, small landscape tree (Fig. 1). Quickly reaching a height of 20 to 25 feet with a similar spread, this multitrunked deciduous tree is actually much stronger than its fragile appearance would suggest. Branch bark often remains bright green even on several-year-old limbs.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Parkinsonia aculeata*

Pronunciation: par-kin-SO-nee-uh

ah-kew-lee-AY-tuh

Common name(s): Jerusalem-Thorn, Retama

Family: *Leguminosae*

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); specimen; residential street tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 1. Middle-aged Jerusalem-Thorn.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 15 to 20 feet

Spread: 20 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: spreading; vase shape

Crown density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: odd pinnately compound

Leaflet margin: entire

Leaflet shape: linear; oblanceolate

Leaflet venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaflet blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; spring flowering; summer flowering; very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: pod

Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches; 1 to 3 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; showy trunk; thorns are present on the trunk or branches

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: medium; thin

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

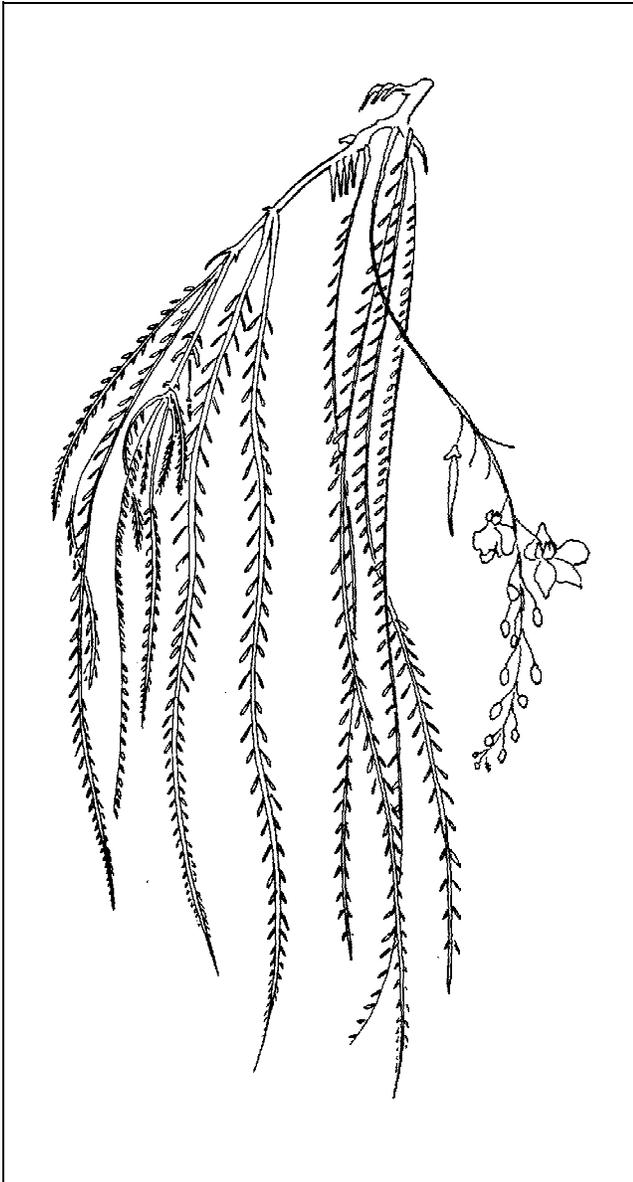


Figure 3. Foliage of Jerusalem-Thorn.

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Be sure to purchase trees with a well-developed central leader and upright branches for street and parking lot plantings to allow for clearance for vehicles. This can be a tough chore as branches weep toward the ground as they spread from the tree so older specimens can be wider than tall. Open-grown trees are beautiful if left unpruned, forming a fountain of fine texture. The stems are armed with short, sharp spines and the trees should be located where they will not injure passersby.

Thriving in full sun on any well-drained soil, Jerusalem-Thorn will tolerate heat, drought, alkaline soil, and salt but not wet, soggy soil. It will grow in

clay only if it drains very well. In spite of its rapid growth rate, it has strong wood, withstanding harsh winds with ease due to the open growth habit. However, the trees have a short life, approximately 15 to 20 years. Poor drainage may account for short life on many sites, so locate it accordingly in areas where soil is never wet for more than an hour or two. The bark is thin and easily injured and the tree appears to compartmentalize decay poorly. Locate the tree properly and design the site to minimize trunk injury.

Adapted to arid regions, Jerusalem-Thorn is one of the best choices for hot, dry locations and its salt-tolerance makes it ideal for seaside plantings. The light shade afforded by the fine-textured foliage allows lawns to thrive beneath this tree and its small size allows a multitude of applications, from specimen, parking lot, median, or street tree, set back from the road or walk. There are reports of the plant escaping cultivation in some locations along the gulf coast.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests

Some pests of Jerusalem Thorn are scales and thorn bugs, but none are serious.

Diseases

One disease that infects this tree on wet soils is root rot but none are serious on other sites.

Witches-broom occasionally causes a proliferation of branches forming tight heads of foliage.