



Pithecellobium flexicaule Ebony Blackbead¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

This 15 to 30-foot-tall evergreen tree is native to Texas and Mexico and is ideal for use in dry, desert landscapes (Fig. 1). The short branches are clothed in very small, dark green leaflets and make up a 15 to 20-foot-wide rounded canopy which casts medium shade below. Short thorns are interspersed among the branches. From June to August, Texas Ebony is decorated with dense, plume-like spikes of very fragrant, light yellow to white blossoms. The dark brown to black, woody seed capsules which follow are four to six inches long and persist on the tree. In Mexico, the seeds from these pods are eaten, and the black woody shells have been known to be roasted as a coffee substitute in times past. The attractive, short trunk of Texas Ebony is covered with smooth, grey bark. It makes a nice medium-sized shade tree.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Pithecellobium flexicaule*

Pronunciation: pith-eh-sell-LOE-bee-um
fleck-sih-KAWL-ee

Common name(s): Ebony Blackbead, Texas-Ebony

Family: *Leguminosae*

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; reclamation plant; shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

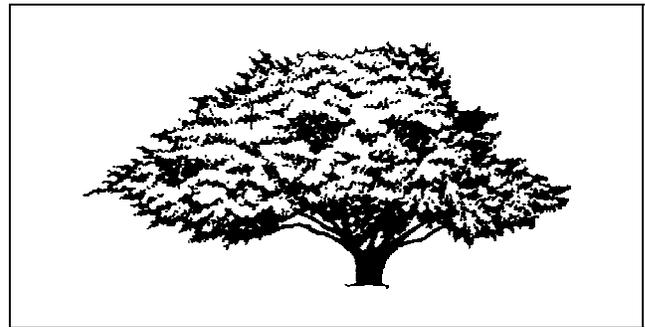


Figure 1. Mature Ebony Blackbead.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 20 to 30 feet

Spread: 20 to 30 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: round; spreading; vase shape

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: medium

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: bipinnately compound; even pinnately compound

Leaflet margin: entire

Leaflet shape: elliptic (oval); obovate

Leaflet venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

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: white; yellow

Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; showy; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated; pod

Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: black; brown

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

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: 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: brown; green

Current year twig thickness: stout; thick

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in full sun

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

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

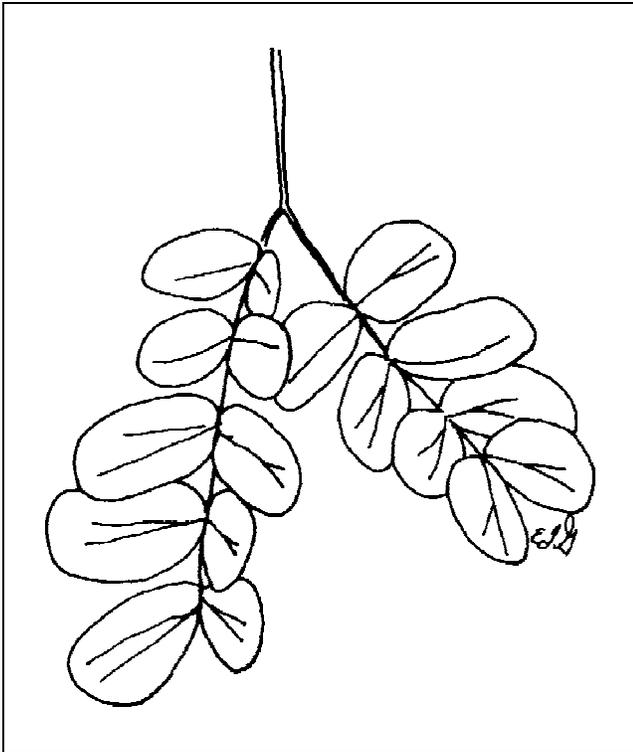


Figure 3. Foliage of Ebony Blackbead.

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Preferring well-drained, alkaline soils, Texas Ebony will thrive in full sun with little water once established. Trees are tolerant of wind and compacted soil, helping to make them a popular choice for arid landscapes.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Be careful not to over-irrigate.