



# *Pithecellobium flexicaule* Ebony Blackbead<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

## 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**

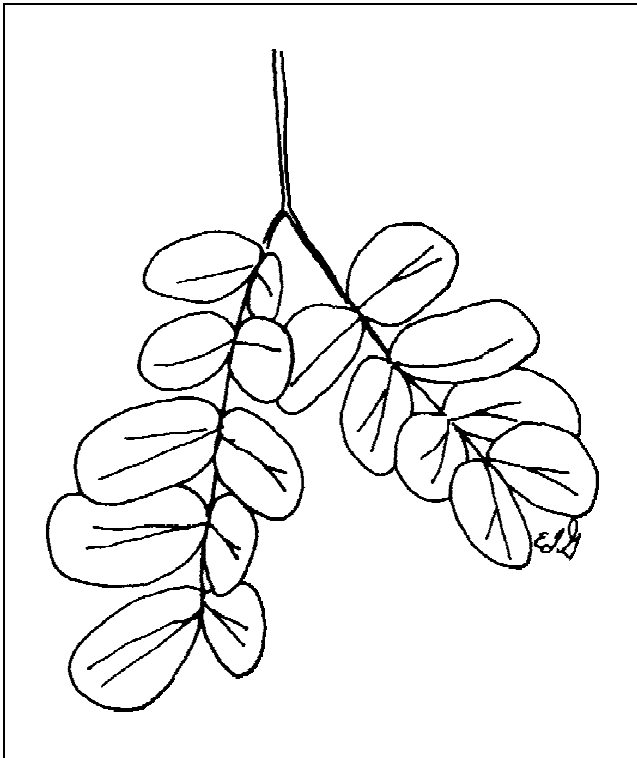
**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**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.