



ARIZONA-SONORA DESERT MUSEUM

PLANT CARE INFORMATION

Desert Ironwood or Palo Fierro

Olneya tesota

DESCRIPTION: This tree is a keystone plant in the Sonoran Desert. Desert Ironwood has been shown to be important as a nurse plant for many other species of plants, and a food and shelter source for dozens of bird, mammal, and reptile species. As a landscape plant, it has the desirable traits of an intensely vivid bloom of pink to lavender “pea” flowers during the hot, dry time of late April through early May. It grows at a moderate rate to 15 feet or taller by 20 feet wide, providing a nice shady area. It is native to most of the Sonoran Desert in Arizona, SE California, NW Sonora, and much of Baja California and BC Sur, Mexico.

RECOMMENDED USE: Large patio tree, accent or specimen, or desert revegetation. There is enough medium shade under it to grow sun-sensitive plants beneath it. Use it to shelter a cactus garden or sun-sensitive veggies such as tomatoes, peppers, or strawberries.

CULTURE:



Hardiness: Equal to palo verdes, although may be sensitive to severe freezes as a young plant.



Sun tolerance: Full sun is necessary to promote healthy growth and good form.



Watering and feeding: Although it is drought tolerant, it does better with moderate water in the growing season. It can eventually be weened to just rainfall, but it may take years to do, and the plants health may suffer. Fertilizing is probably not needed.



Soil requirements: Does well in most well-drained soils, even when caliche is near the surface. It will be severely stunted in very rocky foothill sites.



Pruning: Only minimal pruning needed to shape. As it gets larger, lower spiny branches can be taken off.