

The Weekly Plant 5 March 2015

Common names: feathery cassia, silver cassia

Scientific name: *Senna artemisioides*¹ (formerly *Cassia artemisioides*)

TAV location: in several landscaped lots in the Village. Also along Golf Links and many other places around town.

Discussion

Feathery cassia is one of the loveliest exotic shrubs used in Tucson landscapes. A native of Australia, this evergreen shrub is covered with showy, lightly fragrant yellow flowers in early spring.

Feathery cassia is in the pea family (Fabaceae). The flowers are similar to those found on palo verde and on desert senna, a related Arizona native that was featured in Weekly Plant on 28 July 2013. As with all “peas”, the fruit is a “pea pod” technically known as a legume.



Above: *Senna* flowers. Note the pea pods beginning to form. The feathery foliage is shown at the lower right.

Right: Large, not so attractive, mature pea pods.



Feathery cassia is listed as growing up to about 6 ft x 6 ft. If this is too large for your landscape, you can gently prune it, but be careful. The flower buds are formed in August. If you prune after that you will cut off all the flower buds and have a lovely but flowerless plant the next spring. Instead, wait until flowering has finished and the pods are forming. The pods will be abundant and unattractive, growing to about 4” in length. Their removal is a perfect excuse for pruning this shrub into a natural shape.

There is another Australian native - prostrate acacia (*Acacia redolens*¹) - flowering in many landscapes. It, too, is in the pea family but has flowers that resemble “puffballs”, similar to those that form on our native acacias. This plant works well as an evergreen groundcover in large spaces. Though usually growing only to a height of 2 ft, it can spread to 20 feet wide. Put it on a slope where it has plenty of space.



Prostrate acacia:

Left: a single plant spreading wide.

Above: the puffball flowers are small but abundant

¹ Tropicos is the source of the currently accepted scientific name: <http://www.tropicos.org/>