

The Weekly Plant

28 June 2016

Common names: Texas ebony

Scientific name: *Ebenopsis ebano*¹(formerly *Pithecellobium flexicaule*)

In our Community: lot 89, where house is closest to the road. Most flowers have faded but there are lots of buds. Check it in a week or two to see flowers.

Discussion

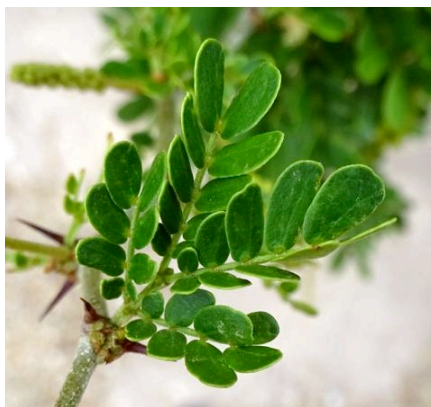
Texas ebony is native to the southern tip of Texas and southward into Mexico - think South Padre Island area. The leaves are dark green and mostly evergreen, different from those of most desert plants, making this tree a popular addition to landscapes. It can grow to 30 feet high and wide - even to 40 feet high and wide - making it suitable as a shade tree (but don't plant it too close to your house - give it room to grow to 40 feet wide).

Texas ebony typically blooms in June for just a few weeks but may rebloom with monsoon rains. The yellowish flowers are clustered in elongated "puff balls" and can cover the tree. They are followed by lots of big, black seed pods. Really big, really tough, really lots of messy pods under the tree, black seed pods, 4-6" long.



Even with the seed pods (perhaps the inspiration for a 2nd common name for this tree - ape's earring²) and the large size, Texas ebony is a good choice for our area. With irrigation this tree will remain evergreen unless temperature falls into the low 20°Fs. Without irrigation, it may drop its leaves briefly in late spring right before flowering. Texas ebony is quite drought tolerant once established, but slow growing. When young, deep summer irrigation twice a month will increase the growth rate.

In its native habitat, Texas ebony grows full and low to the ground. If this fits your landscape design, there is no need to prune it up. Just let it go wild. It can, however, be pruned to become a multi-stemmed shade



tree. As the tree grows, gradually remove the lower branches and extra stems until you can walk under the spreading branches. But, be careful! Hidden under those lovely dark green leaves are pairs of curved stipular spines, each up to half inch long. Personal observation: if you try to work within the tree (hey, how do you think I get all these great photos?), you will get snagged and stuck and those spines are sharp! Gloves highly recommended. Or, don't prune and create a highly effective barrier hedge.

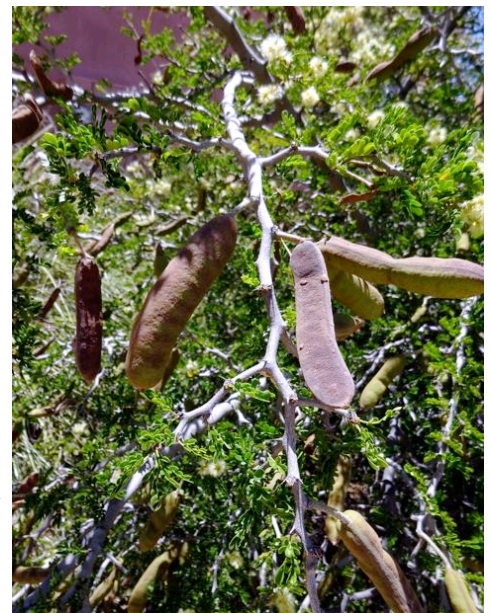
Top left: elongated flower clusters

Bottom left: A single leaf (with 4 segments, each with several leaflets) and the red spines!

Top right: The seed pods are 4-6" long, 1" wide and thick.

The young stems twist in a zig-zag pattern.

Bottom right: seed pods eventually turn black, fall, and break open. Note the segmented interior.



¹ [Tropicos](#) is source for accepted scientific name.

² Called "ebony" because of its dark heartwood, often tinged with purple.