

Weekly Plant Photo Edition

6 February 2020

Common Names: Mexican palo verde, Jerusalem thorn

Scientific name: *Parkinsonia aculeata*

This is an early warning about an invasive plant that is just starting to appear in our community.

Mexican palo verde has been on our prohibited plant list since the very beginning of our community. This tree is an aggressive reseeder (a "great big weed" per my friend at the UA Herbarium). Not only does the tree spread by seed, it readily hybridizes with our native palo verdes, potentially producing hybrids that can out-compete them. The seeds are long-lived, meaning an infested area must be monitored for seedlings for 10, maybe even 15, years after a flowering tree is removed. Mexican palo verde is believed to be native to southern Mexico and Central America. It is a problem worldwide and is a *Weed of National Significance* in Australia (<https://tinyurl.com/v4zll3c>).

I have seen a few small Mexican palo verdes in our community recently. I hope you will learn to recognize this tree - its exceptionally long leaves make it an easy ID - and will eliminate it from your yard before it begins to flower. If you need assistance with identification or removal, please contact any member of the Open Space and Trails Committee.



Spines are found at the base of each leaf.



Mexican palo verde can quickly grow to 30 feet or more. The wood is brittle and breaks easily during high monsoon winds. The leaves and seed pods can create a litter problem. The tips of the spines readily break off and infect skin. Seeds spread and germinate easily. Roots left in the soil can resprout.

Recognize this invasive plant by:

- Green bark on smaller branches (trunk is brown).
- Skinny leaves, 8-16 inches long, sometimes with many small leaflets.
- Paired, curved spines at base of each leaf.