

## VELVET MESQUITE

*Prosopis velutina* Woot.

Plant Symbol = PRVE

Contributed by: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center & UC Davis Arboretum



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### Alternative Names:

mesquite

### Uses

*Ethnobotanic:* The pods of this mesquite provided an important food to the Maricopa, Pima, Haulapais, and other tribes of the Southwest and are still very important today. The pods or the seeds alone are ground in a mortar or the seeds are sometimes parched and afterwards ground into a meal that is very nourishing. This meal is eaten as is, used to sweeten other seed mixtures, or made into bread. Traditionally a drink was prepared from the beans by pounding them in a stone mortar, mixing cold water with the flour, and the product was strained and drunk. The black gum from the mesquite was an important medicine to the Pima. It was boiled with a little water and applied to sore lips and gums, chapped fingers, and taken internally to cleanse the system. Mesquite leaves were pounded and boiled and placed on the eyes of Pima individuals as a treatment for pink eye. The Pima used black gum in a concoction to dye gray hair black.

*Industrial:* The wood is used for fence posts and the heartwood takes a fine polish. The flowers are used as a source of bee food in the honey industry.

*Wildlife:* Mesquite is an important tree to wildlife. The seeds are eaten by jackrabbits, Gambel quail,

songbirds, various small mammals, and domestic livestock. Western chipmunks, ground squirrels, pocket mice, and various species of kangaroo and wood rats consume the foliage. Different birds also nest in the tree's canopy.

### Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values. This species is a valuable native of the southwest US. A synonym, *Prosopis articulata*, referring to a South American plant, is listed as noxious Federally and in the States of Florida and North Carolina (two states that include all names on the Federal list).

### Description

This deciduous shrub or tree is less than 15 m in height with a spreading, rounded crown. Every part of the plant has short, dense hairs. The branches are crooked with spines 1-2 cm. The fern-like compound leaves are divided into many tiny leaflets. The trunk has a shaggy bark. The inflorescence is a spike-like raceme and the yellow corolla has free petals. The fruits are 8-15 cm linear and flat and are tan-colored or sometimes streaked with red.

### Distribution

This mesquite is found below 1700 m in desert washes and plains in Yavapai County, Arizona east and south to western Texas and northern Mexico. It is common in Sonora at least as far south as Guaymas and uncommon in California, being found in the San Joaquin Valley, and the central and south coasts. For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

### Establishment

Gather the seed pods and take the seeds out of the pods. Put the seeds in scalding water and let the water cool. Plant seeds in a well-drained soil in deep pots or tree tubes in autumn. Sprinkle soil on top of the seeds and place one-quarter inch gravel on top of the dirt. The seeds should be spaced one-half inch apart and the tree tubes placed in partial shade with morning sun and afternoon shade. Water the containers right away and keep them moist. As soon

as the plants form one true leaf, transplant one plant per container and water. Keep the containers watered but allows the surface of the soil to dry out in between watering. Plant each dormant seedling in the ground the following fall or winter in partial sun and well-drained soil. Plants will tolerate cold to 5 degrees F. Protect the plants from wildlife. Water the plants and keep them damp if the rains are insufficient. Also in areas without summer rainfall do some watering in summer, about every 2 to 3 weeks. Continue to water deeply throughout the life of the plant once in awhile. Mesquite should be lightly damp all summer long.

### Management

Mesquite can tolerate pruning of the lower branches and it can be shaped into a small tree with an exposed trunk or let grown naturally with the branches touching the ground.

### Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

This species is available from native plant nurseries within its range. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under "United States Government." The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be listed under the subheading "Department of Agriculture."

### References

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