***Edible Trees – Not Just for Wildlife***

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As we develop more and more natural areas, it is always wise (and responsible) to include at least some native vegetation when we plan the new landscapes. With careful selection, native landscape trees can replace lost food sources and nesting or roosting habitat for at least some local wildlife.

The edibles that our native trees provide are often overlooked in regards to humans.

Too often when people think of an edible landscape, they think vegetables and fruit trees.

Of course, for the best harvest, these native trees should be placed in the proper location (soil, light, temperature, wind, and space conditions), watered properly and not over-fertilized, and pruned properly (especially scheduling pruning to allow development of the harvestable part of the tree).

Harvest fruit before it falls to the ground, preferably before monsoon rains, to avoid possibility of fungal aflatoxins (toxic carcinogens produced by species of *Aspergillus*).

\*caution! Do your research! Just because a tree produces fruit that birds relish doesn’t necessarily indicate that it is safe for people to eat…

*Celtis pallida* (*C. ehrenbergiana*) - Desert Hackberry

Cannabaceae – Hemp family (Ulmaceae – Elm family)

8-15’ tall and wide; evergreen to semi-deciduous; full sun, partial shade, filtered sun

hardy to 10° F (low, mid elevations – 1,500-3,000’)

insect pollinated; attracts bees, butterflies, moths

edible part: fruit (fresh, cooked or dried)

harvest season: summer

*Celtis reticulata* (*C. laevigata* var. *reticulata*) – Netleaf Hackberry, Canyon Hackberry

Cannabaceae – Hemp family (Ulmaceae – Elm family)

20-35’ tall and wide; winter deciduous; full sun, partial shade, filtered sun

hardy to -20° F (low, mid, high elevations – 1,500-6,000’)

wind pollinated, usually cross-pollinated

edible part: fruit (fresh, cooked or dried)

harvest season: late summer

*Cercis occidentalis* (*C. orbiculata, C. canadensis* var. *orbiculata*) – Western Redbud, AZ Redbud

Fabaceae – Pea family

6-20’ tall, 6-15’ wide; winter deciduous; full sun, partial shade, filtered sun

hardy to 0° F (mid, high elevations – 4,000-6,000’)

bee pollinated, dioecious with male and female trees; attracts butterflies

edible part: flower buds, flowers (fresh in beverages, salads), pods and seeds (cooked)

harvest season: spring - flowers, summer - seed

*Chilopsis linearis* – Desert Willow

Bignoniaceae – Bignonia, Trumpet Vine family

15-30’ tall and wide; winter deciduous; full sun, partial shade, filtered sun

hardy to at least 10° F (low, mid elevations – 1,500-5,000’)

cross-pollinated; attracts bees and hummingbirds

edible part: flowers (dried to make tea – \*do not use if pregnant)

harvest season: summer

*Juniperus monosperma* – Oneseed Juniper

Cupressaceae – Cypress family

6-20’ tall, 6-15’ wide; evergreen; full sun

hardy to -25° F (mid to high elevations – 3,000-7,000’)

wind pollinated, monoecious

edible part: fruit (fresh, cooked, or made into beverage)

harvest season: mid- to late fall (September – November)

*Olneya tesota* – Ironwood, Palo Fierro

Fabaceae – Pea family

15-25’ tall and wide; evergreen to semi-evergreen; full sun

hardy to 20° F (low elevations – below 2,500’)

insect pollinated

edible part: flowers (fresh), seed (green, or mature sprouted or roasted)

harvest season: May – flowers, June - green seed, July-August – mature seed

*Parkinsonia florida* (*Cercidium floridum*)– Blue Palo Verde

Fabaceae – Pea family

25-35’ tall and wide; winter or drought deciduous; full sun

hardy to 10° F (low, mid elevations – sea level to 4,000’)

insect pollinated; attracts bees

edible part: flowers (fresh or cooked), immature pods and mature seeds (cooked)

harvest season: mid-spring – flowers, summer – pods

*Parkinsonia microphylla* (*Cercidium microphyllum*) – Littleleaf Palo Verde, Foothills Palo Verde

Fabaceae – Pea family

12-18’ tall and wide; winter or drought deciduous; full sun

hardy to 15° F (low, mid elevations – 500-4,000’)

insect pollinated; attracts bees

edible part: flowers (fresh or cooked), young seed pods (fresh or cooked), seeds (cooked)

harvest season: April – flowers, May, June – green pods, July, August - mature seed

*Pinus edulis*– Pinyon Pine, Twoneedle Pinyon

Pinaceae – Pine family

25-50’ tall, 15-40’ wide; evergreen; full sun

hardy to -15° F (mid, high elevations – 4,000-7,000’)

primarily cross pollinated by wind, but also self-fertile, monoecious

edible part: seed (raw or roasted)

harvest season: fall (September, October)

*Prosopis glandulosa* - Western Honey Mesquite

Fabaceae – Pea family

25 – 35’ tall and wide; winter deciduous; full sun

hardy to 0° F (low, mid, high elevations – sea level-6,500’)

insect pollinated, requires cross-pollination, attracts native bees, butterflies

edible part: mature seed pods (fresh pods, or ground and cooked), seed (ground and cooked)

harvest season: summer, sometimes early fall

*Prosopis pubescens* – Screwbean Mesquite

Fabaceae – Pea family

10-20’ tall and wide; winter deciduous; full sun

hardy to 0° F (low, mid elevations – sea level-4,500)

insect pollinated, requires cross-pollination, attracts native bees, butterflies

edible part: mature seed pods, seed

harvest season: summer, sometimes early fall

*Prosopis velutina* - Velvet Mesquite

Fabaceae – Pea family

20-30’ tall and wide; winter deciduous; full sun

hardy to 5° F (low, mid elevations – 1,000-5,000’)

insect pollinated, requires cross-pollination, attracts native bees, butterflies

edible part: mature seed pods, seed

harvest season: summer, sometimes early fall

*Quercus emoryi* – Emory Oak, Desert Live Oak

Fagaceae – Beech family

15-65’ tall, 20-65’ wide; evergreen; full sun, partial shade

hardy to -10° F (mid, high elevations – 3,000-8,000’)

wind pollinated, self-fertile; monoecious

edible part: fruit (seed) (fresh, dried or cooked - if bitter soak to remove tannins)

harvest season: fall (September, October)

*Rhus ovata* – Sugar Sumac, Sugar Bush

Anacardiaceae – Sumac family

8-15’ tall and wide; evergreen; full sun, partial shade, filtered sun

hardy to 10° F (low, mid elevations – 3,000-5,000’)

insect pollinated; attracts bees

edible part: fruit

harvest season: late spring, early summer

*Sambucus nigra* ssp. *canadensis* (*S. mexicana, Sambucus nigra* ssp. *mexicana*) – Mexican Elderberry

Adoxaceae – Adoxas family (Caprifoliaceae – Honeysuckle family)

10-30’ tall, 10-15’ wide; winter and drought deciduous; full sun, partial shade, filtered sun

hardy to 0° F (low, mid, high elevations – 1,000-5,000’)

self-pollinating, but produce better when cross-pollinated by insects, including native or

honeybees, flies or beetles

edible part: flowers (fresh, infused in wine, battered and fried), fruit flesh (fresh, cooked, in

preserves)

harvest season: late spring - flowers, summer to early fall – fruit

\*plant parts are toxic, as are un-ripened fruit; fruit of some other species must be cooked

*Ziziphus obtusifolia* - Graythorn, Lote Bush

Rhamnaceae – Buckthorn family

8-12’ tall and wide; evergreen; full sun, partial shade, filtered sun

hardy to 15° F (low, mid elevations – 1,000-5,000’)

insect pollinated

edible part: fruit (fresh or dried)

harvest season: late spring, summer, fall

**Tree-like Edibles**

*Carnegiea gigantea* – Saguaro

Cactaceae – Cactus family

20-45’ tall, 6-8’ wide; full sun

hardy to 25° F (low, mid elevations – below 3,500’)

pollination conducted by nocturnal, nectar feeding bats, and diurnally by bees and doves

edible part: fruit, seeds

harvest season: June, July

*Washingtonia filifera* – Desert Fan Palm, California Fan Palm

Arecaceae – Palm family

40-60’ tall, 12-15’ wide; evergreen; full sun

hardy to18° F (low, mid elevations – below 3,500’)

primarily cross-pollinated by insects, but self-pollination is possible

edible part: fruit (fresh, dried or cooked)

harvest season: late summer through fall (September – November)

*Yucca elata* - Soaptree Yucca

Asparagaceae

8-15’ tall, 6-10’ wide; evergreen; full sun

hardy to -10° F (low, mid, high elevations – 1,500-6,000’)

cross pollinated by the yucca moths

edible part: young flowering shoot (chewed fresh or roasted), flowers (fresh or cooked,

boiled), inner stem tissues

harvest season: spring, late spring

**A Few Resources:**

Plants Database – USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service – search for native ranges, etc.

plants.usda.gov

ITIS – Integrated Taxonomic Information System – botanical nomenclature

https://www.itis.gov/

LEAF – Linking Edible Arizona Forests

https://leafnetworkaz.org/

Harvest calendar:

https://leafnetworkaz.org/resources/HARVEST/Harvest%20calendar.pdf