**Parkinsonia aculeata: Jerusalem-Thorn**
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**Introduction**

Loose, flowing, delicate leaflets, a light, airy, low-branching growth habit with pendulous branch-tips, and a profusion of small, slightly fragrant, yellow blooms combine to create this popular, small landscape tree. Quickly reaching a height of 20 to 25 feet with a similar spread, this multitrunked deciduous tree is actually much stronger than its fragile appearance would suggest. Branch bark often remains bright green even on several-year-old limbs.

**Family:** Leguminosae  
**USDA hardiness zones:** 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)  
**Origin:** not native to North America  
**Invasive potential:** has been evaluated using the IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas (Fox et al. 2005). This species is not documented in any undisturbed natural areas in Florida. Thus, it is not considered a problem species and may be used in Florida.  
**Uses:** street without sidewalk; specimen; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; urban tolerant; highway median  
**Availability:** not native to North America

**General Information**

**Scientific name:** Parkinsonia aculeata  
**Pronunciation:** par-kin-SO-nee-uh ah-kew-lee-AY-tuh  
**Common name(s):** Jerusalem-Thorn, Retama

Figure 1. Middle-aged Parkinsonia aculeata: Jerusalem-Thorn  
Credits: Ed Gilman  

Figure 2. Range
**Description**

**Height:** 15 to 20 feet  
**Spread:** 20 to 25 feet  
**Crown uniformity:** irregular  
**Crown shape:** vase, spreading  
**Crown density:** open  
**Growth rate:** fast  
**Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)  
**Leaf type:** odd-pinnately compound  
**Leaf margin:** entire  
**Leaf shape:** linear, oblanceolate  
**Leaf venation:** none, or difficult to see  
**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous  
**Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** no color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

![Figure 3. Foliage](image)

**Flower**

**Flower color:** yellow  
**Flower characteristics:** very showy

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** pod or pod-like  
**Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches, 3 to 6 inches  
**Fruit covering:** dry or hard  
**Fruit color:** brown  
**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns  
**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure  
**Breakage:** resistant  
**Current year twig color:** green  
**Current year twig thickness:** thin, medium  
**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** full sun  
**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained  
**Drought tolerance:** high  
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high

**Other**

**Roots:** not a problem  
**Winter interest:** no  
**Outstanding tree:** yes  
**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown  
**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown  
**Pest resistance:** free of serious pests and diseases

**Use and Management**

Be sure to purchase trees with a well-developed central leader and upright branches for street and parking lot plantings to allow for clearance for vehicles. This can be a tough chore as branches weep toward the ground as they spread from the tree so older specimens can be wider than tall. Open-grown trees are beautiful if left unpruned, forming a fountain of fine texture. The stems are armed with short, sharp spines and the trees should be located where they will not injure passersby.

Thriving in full sun on any well-drained soil, Jerusalem-Thorn will tolerate heat, drought, alkaline soil, and salt but not wet, soggy soil. It will grow in clay only if it drains very well. In spite of its rapid growth rate, it has strong wood, withstanding harsh winds with ease due to the open growth habit. However, the trees have a short life, approximately 15 to 20 years. Poor drainage may account for short life on many sites, so locate it accordingly in areas where soil is never wet for more than an hour or two. The bark is thin and easily injured and the tree appears to compartmentalize decay poorly. Locate the tree properly and design the site to minimize trunk injury.

Adapted to arid regions, Jerusalem-Thorn is one of the best choices for hot, dry locations and its salt-tolerance makes it ideal for seaside plantings. The light shade afforded by the fine-textured foliage allows lawns to thrive beneath this tree and its small size allows a multitude of applications, from specimen, parking lot, median, or street tree, set back from the road or walk. There are reports of the plant escaping cultivation in some locations along the gulf coast.

Propagation is by seed.
Pests
Some pests of Jerusalem Thorn are scales and thorn bugs, but none are serious.

Diseases
One disease that infects this tree on wet soils is root rot but none are serious on other sites.

Witches-broom occasionally causes a proliferation of branches forming tight heads of foliage.

Literature Cited