

# *Pithecellobium flexicaule*: Ebony Blackbead<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This 15 to 30-foot-tall evergreen tree is native to Texas and Mexico and is ideal for use in dry, desert landscapes. The short branches are clothed in very small, dark green leaflets and make up a 15 to 20-foot-wide rounded canopy which casts medium shade below. Short thorns are interspersed among the branches. From June to August, Texas Ebony is decorated with dense, plume-like spikes of very fragrant, light yellow to white blossoms. The dark brown to black, woody seed capsules which follow are four to six inches long and persist on the tree. In Mexico, the seeds from these pods are eaten, and the black woody shells have been known to be roasted as a coffee substitute in times past. The attractive, short trunk of Texas Ebony is covered with smooth, grey bark. It makes a nice medium-sized shade tree.

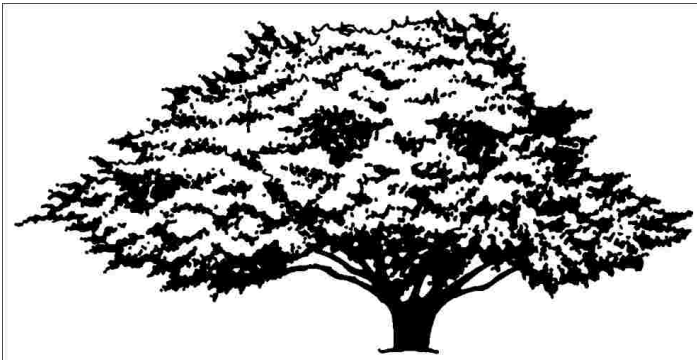


Figure 1. Mature *Pithecellobium flexicaule*: Ebony Blackbead

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Pithecellobium flexicaule*

**Pronunciation:** pith-eh-sell-LOE-bee-um  
fleck-sih-KAWL-ee

**Common name(s):** Ebony Blackbead, Texas-Ebony

**Family:** *Leguminosae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** native to North America

**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

**Uses:** parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; highway median; reclamation; shade; specimen; container or planter

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree



Figure 2. Range

1. This document is ENH642, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed May 2011. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.

## Description

**Height:** 20 to 30 feet

**Spread:** 20 to 30 feet

**Crown uniformity:** irregular

**Crown shape:** spreading, vase, round

**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** fine

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** bipinnately compound, even-pinnately compound

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval), obovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** yellow, white/cream/gray

**Flower characteristics:** showy

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated, pod or pod-like

**Fruit length:** 3 to 6 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** brown, black

**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, brown

**Current year twig thickness:** thick, very thick

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

## 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

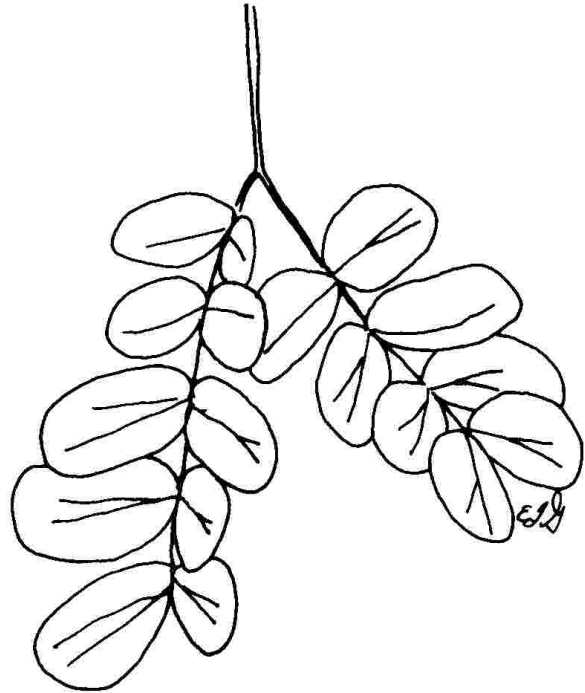


Figure 3. Foliage

## Use and Management

Preferring well-drained, alkaline soils, Texas Ebony will thrive in full sun with little water once established. Trees are tolerant of wind and compacted soil, helping to make them a popular choice for arid landscapes.

Propagation is by seed.

## Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Be careful not to over-irrigate.