**Sophora secundiflora: Texas Mountain Laurel**

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

**Introduction**

Texas mountain laurel is a small North American native evergreen, growing 15- to 25-feet-tall with a 10-foot-spread but is capable of reaching up to 50-feet-tall in its native habitat. It has a narrow upright silhouette and dense foliage which lends itself well to being pruned into a tree form. Texas mountain laurel can be used as a specimen, patio, or street tree and is ideal for use as a screen, bank cover, or an espalier. The 2-inch-long, dark green leaves are glossy, thick, and leathery. In spring, Texas mountain laurel is a beautiful sight as it displays its dense, 2- to 5-inch-long, pendulous clusters of purple/blue, extremely fragrant flowers. Every so often, a white-flowered form can be found. The hairy seedpods which follow are 8-inches-long and ripen to reveal the inner, bright red seeds. These seeds are quite decorative and have been used to make necklaces but they are also poisonous. The fissured bark is dark gray to black.

**General Information**

- **Scientific name:** *Sophora secundiflora*
- **Pronunciation:** sah-FOE-ruh seck-un-DIHR-uh
- **Common name(s):** Texas mountain laurel, mescalbean
- **Family:** Leguminosae
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 7B through 10A (Fig. 2)
- **Origin:** native to North America
- **Invasive potential:** little invasive potential
- **Uses:** container or planter; reclamation; specimen; hedge; deck or patio; screen; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median; bonsai; street without sidewalk
- **Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

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**Description**

Height: 15 to 20 feet  
Spread: 10 to 12 feet  
Crown uniformity: symmetrical  
Crown shape: upright/erect, round  
Crown density: open  
Growth rate: slow  
Texture: fine

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)  
Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound  
Leaf margin: entire  
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval), obovate  
Leaf venation: pinnate, brachidodrome  
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen  
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches  
Leaf color: green  
Fall color: no color change  
Fall characteristic: not showy

**Culture**

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun, or partial shade  
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; 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

**Use and Management**

Usually found as a multi-trunked small tree, Texas mountain laurel can be trained to a single trunk in the nursery. Single-trunked nursery stock would make nice street trees for planting in small soil spaces, and where overhead space is limited by wires or other structures. Plant a row of Texas mountain laurel on 15 or 20 foot centers to form a nice canopy over a walk, or locate it close to a patio or deck. The bark on multi-trunked specimens shows off nicely when lit up at night from beneath the canopy.

Texas mountain laurel should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained soil. This tough plant will tolerate hot, windy conditions and alkaline or wet soils but not compacted soil. Young trees may benefit from afternoon shading from the intense summer sun until they become established.

Propagation is by seed, cuttings, layering, or grafting. Trees on well-drained soils reportedly have a deep root system and will transplant poorly from the wild.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases of major concern. Tender, young foliage is occasionally consumed by *Uresiphita reveralis*.