
Arizona Rosewood

Arizona rosewood (*Vauquelinia californica*) is an evergreen shrub native to Arizona, Baja California, and northern Mexico. Although it usually starts out as a vase-shaped shrub, it can be trained into a multi-stemmed or single-stemmed tree. It is in the rose family and produces dense clusters of white flowers at the branch tips during the spring season. From a distance, it is often mistaken for oleander or Photinia, but it is more cold hardy than oleander and more drought tolerant than either.

Arizona rosewood plants have shiny, dark green leaves with finely serrated margins. The undersides of the leaves are lighter green and the petioles (leaf stems) are red. The leaves are thick and leathery causing them to be tough and persistent. Native evergreen shrubs often have leathery leaves to withstand winds and prevent excessive moisture loss through the leaf surface. Plants that have tough leathery leaves must keep those leaves for multiple growing seasons otherwise it would not be a worthwhile investment of resources.

Arizona rosewoods are propagated from cuttings and seed. They are slow growing and therefore more expensive than other common shrubs. Plant Arizona rosewood where you are seeking privacy, creating a barrier, want an informal hedge, or a small patio tree. They rarely grow larger than 10 to 15 feet tall and 5 to 10 feet wide when mature. Bees will be attracted to the flowers, so plant them away from heavily used areas if you want to minimize your contact with them.

Containerized Arizona rosewood plants (and other native shrubs) often look a little shabby and unimpressive. Don't let these appearances dissuade you from buying them. It is difficult to keep these plants looking good in pots because they really want to be growing in native soil. Plant it in loosened, unamended soil. Native and drought adapted trees and shrubs often seem to just sit there, growing little if any during the first year. At this slow stage they are growing roots rather than shoots. After planting, irrigate the root ball and surrounding soil deeply and infrequently to further encourage root development.

Like many of our native shrubs, it starts out vase-shaped with multiple stems. In the wild, Arizona rosewood often stays small because of limited water, wind, poor soils, or other environmental factors. This is interesting because native shrubs, when grown in the wild, are often very nicely shaped and have relatively healthy looking foliage. Yet they don't receive any irrigation. However, in landscapes they often grow fast, outgrowing their allotted space. Then they need pruning (not shearing) to reduce their size. Feeling sorry for the shrub after pruning, we fertilize it and water it causing it to grow more. This is a vicious cycle we want to avoid. Do not over water, excessively prune, or fertilize native shrubs. If they were healthy when purchased, planted correctly, and have survived the first growing season, then you can decrease the irrigation frequency to prevent the shrub from growing faster than it should. This way, you won't be tempted to prune it too often. It will also become tougher and less attractive to pests. In other words, tough love is often good for native shrubs.



Arizona rosewood, *Vauquelinia californica*; photo from Mountain States Wholesale Nursery

June 18, 2024

Adapted from original Backyard Gardener publications by Jeff Schalau, Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Yavapai County

The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or genetic information in its programs and activities.