



Sacred Datura

Sacred Datura (*Datura wrightii*) is a large, sprawling, native perennial that grows across Arizona between 1,000 and 7,000 feet elevations. It is a member of the family Solanaceae making it a relative of the tomato, potato, pepper, and eggplant. Other common names include: Jimson weed, thorn apple, Indian apple, moon lily, moon flower, angel's trumpet, and tolguacha. In the wild, it is found on well-drained, sandy soils in arroyos, in washes, on roadsides, and other areas that have periodic disturbance. It is often considered a weed. However, it can easily be incorporated into a drought tolerant landscape with great effect.



Photo by Sue Smith, <https://cals.arizona.edu/yavapaiplants>.

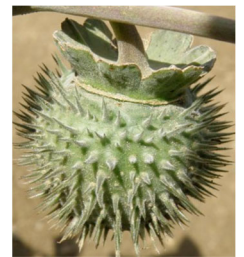
The leaves are medium green on top and gray-green on the underside, have smooth margins, and are alternately arranged on stout stems. Individual plants often grow 2 to 3 feet high and sprawl 6 to 8 feet across. During the summer months, sacred Datura produces dozens of large, fragrant, white, trumpet-shaped flowers. These are often 6 to 8 inches in diameter, have five slender teeth at their margins, bloom in the early evening, and close by noon of the following day. Seedpods are globe-shaped and very spiny. These split open when ripe to release several, semicircular, flattened, yellow-brown seeds.



Mike Lewinski from Tres Piedras, NM, United States / CC BY (<https://creativecommons.org/>)

Night-blooming plants must be pollinated by nocturnal visitors. Sacred Datura flowers are pollinated by sphinx or hawk moths, often seen feeding on the nectar of newly opened flowers. They are often mistaken for hummingbirds as they produce a soft "whir" or "buzz" and hover as they feed. They have a long proboscis that unfurls to reach into the nectary at the base of the bloom. As they do so, they inadvertently assist in pollinating the flowers they visit.

Sacred Datura dies back to the ground following winter freezes. The plant has a fleshy, tuberous root, which resprouts with the return of warm weather. To grow from seed, collect seeds from dried pods in the fall. Before planting, nick them with a file or pocketknife and plant them 5 to a one-gallon pot filled with a sandy soil media in spring (after frost danger is past or with frost protection). If more than one seed germinates, thin out all but one seedling. Allow it to grow until the roots have spread throughout the pot and transplant into a well-drained location during the growing season. Water it intermittently until established during the first year. The following year it should be able to make it on native rainfall. You may spur its growth with supplemental irrigation, but its form and flowering may be adversely affected by excess irrigation.



Seedpod . Photo by Sue Smith, <https://cals.arizona.edu/yavapaiplants>.

All parts of the plant are deadly poisonous. All plant parts (except the flowers) have a very repellent smell and are extremely bitter, which makes deliberate ingestion very unlikely, even by small children. Deliberate consumption is most often linked to those looking for a mind-altering experience. Sadly, death or severe illness can sometimes be the result. Those that survive often have permanently damaged lungs, stomach, intestines, kidneys, and/or heart. This may also be accompanied by mental impairment. These side effects seem a high price to pay for a fleeting psychedelic experience. Thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water after handling sacred Datura plant parts or seeds.

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

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