**Pithecellobium flexicaule**  
Ebony Blackbead

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

This 15 to 30-foot-tall evergreen tree is native to Texas and Mexico and is ideal for use in dry, desert landscapes (Fig. 1). 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.

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  
**Uses:** container or above-ground planter; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; reclamation plant; shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance  
**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 20 to 30 feet  
**Spread:** 20 to 30 feet  
**Crown uniformity:** irregular outline or silhouette  
**Crown shape:** round; spreading; vase shape  
**Crown density:** moderate  
**Growth rate:** medium  
**Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)  
**Leaf type:** bipinnately compound; even pinnately compound  
**Leaflet margin:** entire  
**Leaflet shape:** elliptic (oval); obovate  
**Leaflet venation:** pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
**Leaflet blade length:** less than 2 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** no fall color change

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1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-483, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.  
2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white; yellow
Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; showy; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated; pod
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: black; brown
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; suited for human consumption; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; showy trunk; thorns are present on the trunk or branches

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown; green
Current year twig thickness: stout; thick

Culture

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

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
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.