**Prosopis glandulosa**  
*Mesquite*

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

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**INTRODUCTION**

This North American native tree reaches 30 feet in height and forms a rounded canopy with many drooping, crooked branches emanating low on the trunk (Fig. 1). These branches are armed with one-inch-long spines which can cause much damage to flesh, but thornless selections are available from nurseries. Mesquite has a tendency to form thickets and these thorns help make the dense growth impenetrable. The reddish-brown bark is rough and fissured. The root system of Mesquite is quite extensive and will spread far and wide to consume whatever moisture is available, sometimes to the detriment of other plantings near the tree. Mesquite is considered a weed along the Rio Grande and in other areas in Texas where it will easily invade adjacent land.

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**GENERAL INFORMATION**

- **Scientific name:** Prosopis glandulosa
- **Pronunciation:** pro-SO-piss gland-yoo-LOW-suh
- **Common name(s):** Mesquite, Honey Mesquite
- **Family:** Leguminosae
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 6B through 9 (Fig. 2)
- **Origin:** native to North America
- **Uses:** Bonsai; reclamation plant; shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance
- **Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

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**DESCRIPTION**

- **Height:** 25 to 35 feet
- **Spread:** 25 to 35 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** irregular outline or silhouette
- **Crown shape:** round; spreading
- **Crown density:** open
- **Growth rate:** medium
- **Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)
- **Leaf type:** bipinnately compound; even pinnately compound
- **Leaflet margin:** entire
- **Leaflet shape:** linear
- **Leaflet venation:** none, or difficult to see; parallel
- **Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous
- **Leaflet blade length:** less than 2 inches
- **Leaf color:** green

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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.
Prosopis glandulosa -- Mesquite

Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower
Flower color: yellow
Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering; summer flowering

Fruit
Fruit shape: elongated; pod
Fruit length: 6 to 12 inches; 3 to 6 inches
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; suited for human consumption; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; 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
Current year twig thickness: thin

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

Other
Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: seeds itself into the landscape
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests
USE AND MANAGEMENT

The bright green, pinnately compound leaves lend a fine texture to this irregular-shaped tree which casts a light shade. When given adequate moisture and trained and pruned to create a somewhat uniformly-shaped crown, Mesquite can be an attractive, somewhat weeping landscape specimen. From May to September, Mesquite is adorned with two-inch-wide, extremely fragrant blooms which are not especially showy due to their yellow to greenish-white coloration but are still easily found by bees who love them. The seeds which follow are quite popular with birds and other wildlife and, at times, man. The southwestern native Americans used the seed, or beans, as a food source. The beans contain as much as 30% sugar and, when fermented, produce an alcoholic beverage. A meal made from the beans was also used by native Americans to make bread.

Mesquite should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil. The tree is very drought tolerant. Young plants can be successfully transplanted while small, but they need irrigation until established. Fire used to limit its invasive habit. It has become an unimaginable weed in Texas due to fire control. Prior to fire control, heat from flames killed many trees and this kept the tree from spreading throughout the region.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests

It is occasionally bothered by borers.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.