



TREES
FOR THE
DESERT AREA OF KERN COUNTY

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TREES FOR THE DESERT AREA OF KERN COUNTY

The trees in the following list are typically tolerant to extremes of heat and cold, drought and wind, and poor soil conditions. This is not an all-inclusive list, but rather a selection from the many trees which tolerate (or even prefer) desert conditions. Remarks and pest problems apply to the desert areas of Kern County.

Uses. Most of these trees may be used with fine effect in "groves" of five or more to landscape large areas with a natural look. Or a single eye-catching specimen tree may be pruned and developed as a focal point in the yard. Many can be grown either as multi- or single-trunked trees and a few (such as the desert willow) are as attractive in the winter as with summer foliage.

Planting. Dig a hole plenty large enough to accommodate existing roots. Do not add organic material or other soil amendments. Cut any heavy circling roots. Set plant slightly above the ground surface (as it will sink slightly), fill with the same loosened soil that came from the hole, and water well. Until the tree is established, water often and close to the tree, remembering that the roots have not yet reached out into the surrounding soil. After the tree is well established, gradually water it less often and place it on a regular schedule.

Care. Fertilizer is often necessary, producing more luxuriant growth (which, in a very windy location, could be a disadvantage, possibly causing broken branches). Apply light applications in fall or spring. See Kern County Cooperative Extension leaflet #8511 "Tree Care" for more information.

Pruning. Native desert trees owe their unique beauty to their lacy foliage and open structure which provides soft, filtered shade; but, if heavily watered and fertilized, a thick, interlaced network of branches will be produced which can mar that open effect. Prune to remove unwanted growth and to control the size of the tree, while preserving the natural structure. Cut out inner and too-heavy growth cleanly back to the trunk. Never "lop off" ends of branches, as this will produce an unsightly brush of growth at the cut end. Instead, shorten too-tall or too-wide limbs by the process of cutting to the next properly positioned side branch. This method produces an "unpruned" look and preserves the tree's own unique structure.

Watering. Plants in the desert can be over watered. Shallow, frequent irrigation is not the best way to water; roots tend to concentrate at the soil surface and salts may accumulate. While drought tolerant trees can ordinarily use as much water as you can give them and will grow accordingly, they can exist and even flourish on small amounts of water. As a rule, mature desert trees thrive with one deep watering no oftener than once a week in the hottest part of summer and once or twice a month in winter. Even in the desert it is possible to over water which can lead to root rot and tree decline.

| MIN TEMP | NAME | HEIGHT | SPREAD | FLOWER | PESTS/DISEASES | REMARKS |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0° | <i>Albizia julibrissin</i> Mimosa or silk tree | 10-15' | 20' | Fluffy pink flowers in summer. | Usually pest free. | Hardy, fast growing deciduous tree actually likes desert heat. Graceful, arching branches with light green, fern-like foliage. |
| 0° | <i>Chilopsis linearis</i> Desert willow | 30' | 30' | Fragrant trumpet-shaped flowers all summer in shades of white, lavender, or pink. | Usually pest free. | Deciduous tree, lacy foliage; lovely in fall and winter as well as summer, with smooth gray branches and clusters of dry seed pods. |
| 0° | <i>Cupressus arizonica</i> Arizona cypress | 20-50' | 15-25' | | Susceptible to red spider mite and bark beetle. | Scaly-foliaged conifer with dense form; good windbreak. |
| 0° | <i>Cupressus sempervirens</i> Italian cypress | 50-60' | 10' | | Susceptible to red spider mite and bark beetle. | Tall, vertical tree with pointed top; used for landscaping. |
| -40° | <i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i> Russian olive | 20' | 15' | Very fragrant, small yellow flowers. | Subject to borer damage and a wilt disease. | Silvery gray foliage contrasts with dark mahogany colored trunk. Thorny. |
| 0° | <i>Eucalyptus gunnii</i> Cider gum (Various other species are being grown on an experimental basis in the area at present.) | 40' | 20' | | None presently in Indian Wells Valley. | Tolerant to heat, cold, and drought conditions. Has small, round, silvery leaves. |
| 0° | <i>Fraxinus velutina</i> 'Modesto' Modesto ash | 30' | 20' | | Subject to chlorosis. | Shapely tree, bright gold fall color. |
| -30° | <i>Gleditsia triacanthos inermis</i> Thornless Honeylocust | 30-50' | 20-30' | | Usually pest free. | Fast-growing, spreading tree with graceful foliage; provides filtered shade. Sunburst (golden foliage) is attractive in some landscape situations. |

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|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| -25° | <i>Morus alba</i> Mulberry | 35' | 40' | | Subject to chlorosis. | Fruiting varieties are messy; fruitless varieties are most suitable for yards. Furnishes fast growing, good shade. |
| 18° | <i>Parkinsonia aculeata</i> Palo verde | 15-20' | 20-25' | Clusters of fragrant yellow flowers in early summer. | Palo verde beetle. | Hardy, fast-growing native of Arizona. High canopy of feathery, light green foliage; green bark; exceedingly thorny. |
| 0° | <i>Pinus eldarica</i> Mondell pine (also called Afghan pine) | 30-40' | 15' | | Usually pest free. | Fast-growing, long-needed pine, with a naturally symmetrical shape and a distinctive blue color in young growth. |
| 0° | <i>Pinus halepensis</i> Aleppo pine | 30-50' | 20' | | Susceptible to red spider mite. | Fast-growing, long-needed pine; somewhat sprawling and untidy growth habit; excellent windbreak. |
| 0° | <i>Pinus pinea</i> Italian stone pine | 40' | 15-20' | | Usually pest free. | In maturity has tall, bare trunk with wide, flat crown. |
| 0° | <i>Pistacia chinensis</i> Chinese pistache | 30' | 25' | No flowers to speak of, but leaves provide a vivid splash of scarlet color in fall. | Susceptible to verticillium wilt. | Slow growing in its first years; a handsome, hardy, wide-spreading tree. |
| -20° | <i>Platanus acerifolia</i> London plane tree | 40' | 30' | Insignificant flowers produce decorative spiny seed balls. | Subject to chlorosis, lace bug, and spider mite. | Symmetrical tree with good structure and lobed leaves. |
| 0° to -50°, depending on species. | <i>Populus</i> Cottonwood, cottonless cottonwood, poplar, aspen. | 50' | 40' | Many (not "cottonless" types) have small greenish yellow flowers followed by masses of cottony seeds, which can be a nuisance. | Usually pest free. | Probably the fastest, most easily grown tree for desert shade. Grows very tall and produces quantities of light green, shiny leaves. Wide-spreading roots invade any moist area, including in-ground plumbing. |

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| 0° | <i>Prosopis</i> Mesquite | Varies | Varies | Fuzzy yellowish catkins. | Usually pest free. | Fast-growing when young. Lacey foliage produces a high canopy of filtered shade. Varieties and individual trees may vary widely in shape and size; many are <u>very</u> thorny. |
| 0° | <i>Punica granatum</i> Pomegranate | 15' | 10' | Showy scarlet blossoms in spring which mature to hard, dull red fruits with edible seeds. | Usually pest free. | Thorny but versatile; may be used without pruning for a windbreak, pruned to one or more trunks, or even espaliered. |
| Varies | <i>Quercus</i> Oak | 40' | 40' | | Usually pest free. Eastern deciduous oaks very subject to chlorosis. | Evergreen oaks better adapted than Eastern deciduous oaks. Slow growing but live long. |
| -30° | <i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i> Black locust | 40' | 40' | White flowers in hanging clusters in summer. | Somewhat subject to borers, root rot, and chlorosis. | A thorny, open tree with graceful shape, dark green leaves. Has invasive roots. |
| -10° | <i>Salix babylonica</i> Weeping willow | 30' | 30' | | Subject to chlorosis. Has weak wood. | Traditional weeping form. Needs ample water; has invasive roots. |
| 10° | <i>Tamarix aphylla</i> Athel | 30' | 30' | | Usually pest free. | Bushy, shrub-like tree makes good windbreak or screen of feathery grayish foliage. Looks sad in coldest weather; may freeze when young, but will come up from the root. Roots may invade in-ground plumbing. |
| -20° | <i>Tamarix pentandra</i> Tamarisk | 20' | 15' | Frothy clusters of tiny rose-pink flowers all summer. | Usually pest free. | Deciduous; resembles the athel, but stands the cold better. Roots may invade in-ground plumbing. |

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| -10° | <i>Ulmus parvifolia</i> Chinese elm | 30' | 30' | | Usually pest free. | Fast-growing tree with drooping branches, small leaves. Brittle wood is subject to wind damage. Also <i>Ulmus pumila</i> or Siberian elm, somewhat taller, but susceptible to elm leaf beetle. |
| 15° | <i>Washingtonia filifera</i> California fan palm | 20-40' | 15' | | Usually pest free. | Has thicker trunk than the tall, willowy Mexican palm (<i>W. robusta</i>) and is hardier. Fronds end in a profusion of threadlike fibers. |
| 5° | <i>Yucca aloifolia</i> Spanish bayonet | 10' | 5' | Clusters of ivory flowers on upright stalks. | Usually pest free. | Generally slow growing and hardy. Trunks may sprawl gracefully. Sharp leaf spikes; allow ample room when planting near walkways. |
| 0° | <i>Yucca brevifolia</i> Joshua tree | 15-40' | 10' | Ivory flowers at end of thick stalks or "arms." | Usually pest free. | Very slow growing and has an interesting upright, branching habit of growth. |
| 0° | <i>Ziziphus jujuba</i> Chinese date | 20' | 15' | Insignificant yellow flowers produce edible "dates" in fall. | Usually pest free. | Dense, weeping foliage; good fall color. Thorny. |

Written By: Beverley Wood, Master Gardener

Edited By: Evelyn Callaway, Master Gardener
Kathleen Pratt, Master Gardener
John Karlik, Farm Advisor