

Acacia greggii

[Synonyms : *Acacia greggii* var. *arizonica*, *Senegalia greggii*]

GREGG CATCLAW is a thorny deciduous shrub or tree. Native to south-western North America and to northern Mexico it has fragrant creamy-yellow flowers.

It is also known as Catclaw, Catclaw acacia, Catsclaw acacia, Devils-claw, Devils-claw acacia, Gregg acacia, Long-flowered catclaw, Paradise flower, Tear-blanket, Texas mimosa, and Wait-a-minute bush.

The fruit pods split when ripe. Gregg catclaw is a host for the American desert mistletoe (*Phoradendron californicum*).

Greggii commemorates the name of an American, intellectual frontiersman and plant collector, Josiah Gregg (1806-1850) after whom quite a few plants have been named. Despite ill health (and single-minded to the point of unsociability from many accounts) he was a man of many interests, a trader, historian, surveyor, doctor, interpreter, naturalist and author, who was especially remembered for his account in *The Commerce of the Prairies* of his time trading on the Santa Fe Trail (an important caravan route in the western United States, about 780 miles long). During his short and varied life he managed to collect many plants notably in Mexico and the American south-western state of New Mexico – and he also met members of the Academy of Science at St. Louis, including two German-born botanists and physicians, Frederick Adolph Wislizenus (1810-1889) and Georg Engelmann (1809-1884) and sent plant specimens back east to several noted botanists, Engelmann especially.

Most of the common names allude to the plant's thorny stems.

Both the Cahuilla North American Indians and the Pima tribe ate the stiff, papery and waisted, reddish-brown bean pods as a fresh vegetable. The former also ground the dried pods for cake flour, while the Middle American Seri tribe mixed ground beans with water or sea lion oil to make a porridge. The roasted and ground seeds were used to make bread by the Havasupai Indians and some of the Pima tribe ate the seeds as a famine food.

For the Diegueño Gregg catclaw was fodder for their livestock.

Women in the North American Papago tribe made perfume sachets with the dried buds and the fragrant creamy-yellow flowers.

De-thorned, split twigs have been used by both the Tohono O'Odham and the Havasupai for basketry, and the latter used whole twigs for making brushes.

The Cahuilla Indians valued Gregg catclaw as building material, while some of the Tohono O'Odham used piled dried bushes for fences and made cradle frames from the branches. The stems were fashioned into hooked poles to dislodge the fruit from giant cactus. Their deer hunters also used the stems for camouflage when hunting. Sheep hides were beaten and softened with de-barked stems – and curved rods were used to clean animal skins. The Pima tribe made bows out of the wood.

As firewood some of the Tohono O'Odham Indians preferred to dry the bushes before burning them. The Cahuilla were known to praise the wood as a fuel too.

Settlers learnt to graze their cattle and other animals on the spiny foliage of this common desert plant.

Nectar produced by the flowers is said to yield good honey.

The foliage provides food for deer, rabbits, and rats – and the fruit pods and seeds are enjoyed by birds (who are also attracted by any indigenous mistletoe berries nestling on the plant), as well as other animals.

The stem gum was used locally like gum arabic (*Acacia senegal*).

Also locally the wood has been used to make saddles, tool handles, souvenirs for tourists, and small household items, as well as being burnt as fuel.

Gregg catclaw has been cultivated as hedging.

Medicinally, various parts have been used to treat eye problems, and to ease dysentery and diarrhoea, as well as general gastric and oral inflammation.