

*Parkinsonia aculeata*

[Synonyms : *Parkinsonia spinosa*, *Parkinsonia thomberi*]

**JERUSALEM THORN** is a spiny deciduous shrub or tree. Native to Middle America it has fragrant pea-like, orange-spotted, yellow flowers with orange stamens.

It is also known as *Arrêtenègre* (French), Barbados flower fence, Blue palo verde, *Cina-cina* (Paraguayan), Cuica resin, *Espinillo* (Spanish), Green palo verde, *Hanson sessabani* (Nigerian), Horse bean tree, *Khar* (Persian), *Madam Yass* (Haitian), Mexican palo verde, *Palo verde* (Spanish), Parkinsonia, Parkinsonia cassia, Retama, *Sessaban* (Arabic), and *Vilayati kikar* (Hindi)..

The initially smooth and shiny, yellowish- to dark green bark stands in for the leaves as a source of food for the plant. Leaflets only appear after rain and these fold at night and drop off after a few days..The flowers are pollinated by bees and other insects. The mature pencil-shaped, brown fruit pods (which are constricted between the seeds) can float on water.

Warning - parts of the plant can be poisonous.

Jerusalem thorn can be extremely invasive when introduced outside its native habitat (especially in the vicinity of watering places).

*Aculeata* is derived from Latin *aculeus* (point, sting) meaning ‘prickly’ with reference to the plant bearing spines or spine-tipped leaves.

The name Mexican palo verde describes the plant’s appearance as ‘palo verde’ means ‘green stick’.

Some of the North American Tohono O’Odham Indians stored the sun-dried, cooked seeds for food. In Mexico the glossy brown seeds have also provided food in the past.

Authorities have noted that Jerusalem thorn has been cultivated as an ornamental and as a shade tree or windbreak widely, including in parts of India, and in Cyprus, Israel, Florida in the southern United States, Jamaica, Uganda and South Africa. (The seed pods of these cultivated ornamentals have offered material for dried flower arrangements.) Its thorny branches have also ensured a spiny cattleproof hedging in some places.

It is understood that the young plants grow rapidly – not least in arid areas – and environmentalists have taken advantage of this where appropriate for erosion control.

Since its introduction to Australia Jerusalem thorn has become invasive in some of the wetland areas to such an extent that it is a significant threat to the habitat of native waterbirds. This seems to confirm a note of caution expressed by some authorities that the plant can become invasive if cultivated near watering sites.

Yet its invasive nature has been harnessed for good elsewhere. In Africa and Pakistan Jerusalem thorn (not least because of its rapid growth, enthusiasm for heat and extreme tolerance of drought) has been an active and effective component of revegetation programmes in areas that have become desert.

Goats and sheep will browse young branches, a practice actively encouraged (where the former are concerned especially) in the drier areas of India where the plant has become naturalised. Sheep and cattle are also prepared to eat it and many animals seem to enjoy consuming the seed pods.

Despite the stout thorns the branches provide shelter for small birds.

The brittle wood has been made into charcoal and burnt as fuel, especially in Mexico and Puerto Rico.  
Medicinally, tea-like infusions of bark, leaves or flowers have been used in local treatments for fever or stress.