

Prosopis pubescens

[Synonyms : *Prosopis emoryi*, *Prosopis odorata*, *Strombocarpa odorata*, *Strombocarpa pubescens*]

SCREWBEAN MESQUITE is a thorny deciduous shrub or tree. Native to south-western United States and north-western Mexico, it has greenish-white to yellow flowers with slender showy stamens.

It is also known as Mescrew, Screwbean, Screw-pod mesquite, Scrub mesquite, and Tornillo. The pods contain much sugar and are sweet when chewed.

It is viewed as an endangered species in Arizona in the United States and is protected there. *Pubescens* means 'hairy or downy'.

For several North American Indian tribes including the Kamia and Isleta Indians screwbean mesquite was a source of food, and authorities note that for the Cahuilla and some of the Tohono O'Odham tribes the yellow to brown fruit provided a staple part of their diet. The Mohave cooked the fruit pods as a vegetable, they provided bread flour for both the Cahuilla and some of the Apache tribes (both of whom dried the pods for future use as well), and the flour was made into a porridge-like mush by the Cahuilla. Some of the Apache Indians chewed the raw pods as a delicacy, while children in some of the Tohono O'Odham tribe viewed them as a kind of sweet or confectionery. Sap was eaten as a snack by the latter. The fruit pods or the beans were also used in various ways to make drinks by the Mohave, Cahuilla, some of the Tohono O'Odham and some of the Apache tribes.

Livestock herded by some of the Tohono O'Odham were allowed to graze on the foliage and the small, tightly-twisted fruit pods.

This wood was of value to the Cahuilla who used it both in construction and for making their bows. Some of the Tohono O'Odham made fence posts from it – and they also collected it as fuel. Hualapai Indians made their babies' cradles with the root wood.

There seem to have been a few medicinal uses to which screwbean mesquite was put by some of the North American Indian tribes including the Cahuilla. It offered a treatment for various period problems for some of the women in the Tohono O'Odham tribe. Paiute Indians used it for eye problems, and the Tewa and some of the Apache turned to it for treating some ear ailments. Some of the Tohono O'Odham Indians applied it to wounds and sores.

The boiled pods yield a kind of molasses or syrup.

When forage is scarce, the green or ripe fruit pods have offered an alternative feed for horses and cattle. But in normal seasons the fruit pods and seeds contribute significantly to the diet of many wild desert mammals, birds and insects, including deer, porcupine, skunks, rabbits, squirrels, rats and mice, as well as wild turkey, ravens, ducks, doves and quail – and it provides them with welcome shade and cover too. (Some rabbits eat the leaves and bark as well.)

The hard and durable wood has been used for making fence posts, and tool handles – and it has also been burnt as fuel.

Screwbean mesquite is cultivated as an ornamental plant and it is often grown as a thorny barrier.

