

Las Placitas Association: Native Trees for Placitas

from the field observations and journals of Michael Crofoot

*selected for their ability to survive on precipitation once established, diversity, and variety of color and shape. We are indicating preferred elevation and maintenance requirements..
(for the complete Crofoot listing of 17 Placitas suitable trees, visit www.lasplacitas.org)*

Trees are the bones of your landscape. Plan where they go carefully, taking into account their mature size, and then plant around them. They are our shade givers, water purifiers, and soil makers. They also provide medicine and wildlife habitat . They sequester CO2 and release oxygen. We include both larger trees and several smaller understory trees that can be trained as trees or shrubs. The large Rio Grande Cottonwood is included here because it is truly an iconic New Mexico tree, extending in groves along the river from Colorado to Texas, but it can be problematic in your landscape. If you are planting for a small courtyard area, New Mexico Olive, Desert Willow and fruit trees are better choices.

Name and Description

Habits and Hints

Beneficial Uses



Rio Grande Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides wislizenii*)
Though it can withstand drought, this is a tree that craves water. Its main habitat is in the Rio Grande ecosystem. Grows up to 60 feet at elevations 2,500-6,500. Needs weekly watering during hot weather if roots cannot tap the water table. Cold tolerant.

*The roots are invasive as they seek water, so consider where you plant.
The female bears millions of cotton-like seeds in the spring.
It provides dense shade and tolerates our poor soils.*

*Possibly no other tree on this list has as many beneficial uses: food and shelter for birds and wildlife, medicinal and ceremonial uses and much more.
In fall its golden leaves are a sight to behold.*



Arizona Cypress (*Cupressus arizonica*)
This fast growing tree can reach 50 feet at maturity. It's an evergreen with blue green foliage. It is found naturally on dry, sterile, rocky mountain slopes and canyon walls, but does well when planted on better soils or when irrigated. It requires little maintenance.

*Prefers full sun and is very drought tolerant.
Not particular about soil PH.
Susceptible to pests including borers and mistletoe,*

*Makes an excellent wind-break.
Prevents soil erosion.
Medicinal uses.*



Honey Locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*)
This fast growing tree reaches heights of 20-45' at maturity. It provides filtered shade that allows other growth underneath. Though it prefers moist, well-drained soil, it is tolerant of dry sites and adapts to a wide range of soils. Found naturally along stream beds. Maximum elevation 6,000 feet. (Not native)

*Roots are not invasive.
Both drought tolerant and cold hardy.
Has pest problems requiring treatment.*

*Provides striking fall color, fruit and seeds as well as pollen and nectar for pollinators.
Can be used on hillsides to stabilize poor soil and control erosion.*



Pinon Pine (*Pinus edulis*)
A small bushy evergreen (30') that is slow growing and common on our Placitas hillsides below 7,500 feet. Survives in dry locations and should not be planted where water collects. It is winter hardy and long lived (600 years and more). It is the New Mexico State Tree.

*Thrives in dry, rocky, gravelly locations. Adapted to a wide range of soils and conditions.
Repeated years of severe drought can lead to an attack by pinon ips beetles.*

*Produces edible and nutritious pine nuts that are harvested by human and wildlife alike.
The wood is valued for its pleasant incense smell when used as firewood.*



New Mexico Olive (*Forestiera neomexicana*)
This is a small (15') low maintenance tree that develops great character with age. It is a fast to moderate grower in any soil. It thrives in dry, sunny areas without shade, which is why it is so popular in New Mexico. Native habitat is up to 6,300 feet.

*Grows well in hot dry environments. Low maintenance - not picky about the soil. Cold tolerant.
Prune it into a small tree or use it as a durable shrub in hedges.*





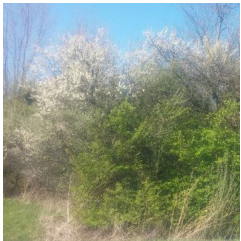
*Females produce fragrant yellow flowers and considerable quantities of blue-black berries that are eaten by birds.
Unpruned they make an effective windbreak.*

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	Name and Description	Habits and Hints	Other Beneficial Uses
	Desert Willow (<i>Chilopsis linearis</i>) <i>A small tree (15-40') that is native to ditch banks, ravines, river banks, arroyos and dry washes. It is a rapidly growing tree that is drought tolerant and easy to maintain. Tolerates cold to about 10 below so not suited to our elevations above 6,000 feet.</i>	<i>Mostly blooms May-June but will continue to bloom throughout the warm season after rains.</i> <i>it does best with just enough water to keep it blooming and green through summer.</i>	<i>Its exotic blooms are favored by hummingbirds.</i> <i>Bows and basketry made from its wood by indigenous people.</i>
	Gambel Oak (<i>Quercus gambelii</i>) <i>A small, round-crowned tree or shrub, sometimes forming thickets, Gambel oak is the common oak of the Rocky Mountains, usually no taller than 30 ft. Native Habitat: Dry, high-elevation hills, slopes and canyons 6,000-8,000 feet.</i>	<i>Train as a tree by pruning off suckers when young.</i> <i>Adaptable to a wide range of soils and moisture conditions.</i> <i>Since it spreads from roots, it regenerates quickly after fires.</i>	<i>Wild turkeys, squirrels, bears and other wildlife eat the sweetish acorns. Deer browse on the foliage.</i> <i>The wood is used mainly for fenceposts and fuel.</i>
	Net-leaf Hackberry (<i>Celtis reticulata</i>) <i>A small to medium sized tree (30') that is nearly as wide as it is high. Found at elevations under 7,000 feet. Some consider it homely, but few trees are hardier or longer lived. Slow growing, this tree can live for 100-200 years. It can thrive in areas with as little as seven inches of rainfall per year.</i>	<i>Although drought tolerant, it will thrive with a regular supply of water. It will grow in a range of soil types including gravel, rocky soil, limestone soils, sandy soil, loamy soil. acidic and alkaline soil.</i>	<i>Excellent for riparian restoration.</i> <i>The berries are a food source.</i> <i>Artisans use it to create a red dye.</i>
	New Mexico Locust (<i>Robinia neomexicana</i>) <i>A small understory tree (10') that grows wild in the Sandia mountains. It will be found along with Gambel oak in spruce-fir and mixed conifer forests. It can dominate shortly after a fire because of its vigorous root sprouting. Found at 4,000-8,500 feet.</i>	<i>Drought and cold tolerant.</i> <i>Although related to other Locusts, it doesn't have the invasive, spreading characteristics, this one is a keeper!</i> <i>Seeds are very poisonous.</i>	<i>New Mexico Locust has beautiful flowers that can brighten whole hillsides in the spring</i> <i>Valuable for erosion control, sprouting from roots and stumps.</i>
	Placitas Wild Cherry (<i>Prunus emarginata</i>) <i>There are two native bitter cherries found in Northern New Mexico: chokecherries and wild cherry. For centuries, both have been used for homemade wine. Placitas is known for its wild cherry wine. This is a small tree (20') and stands occur naturally on northerly facing slopes or in rocky areas that accumulate surface run-off.</i>	<i>Full sun or partial shade; soils can be skeletal and may be rocky, loamy, or sandy.</i>	<i>Dense thickets of wild cherry provide important cover and food for wildlife.</i> <i>Also useful for land reclamation and erosion control</i>
	Native Plum (<i>Prunus americana</i>) <i>A small understory tree (15-20') that is fast growing and short lived. It is native to large portions of North America and produces a sweet, edible fruit although it is threatened by invasive species and loss of seed dispersers. Placitas bears love the fruit - so you may find yourself attracting them.</i>	<i>Blooms April-May with fruit by late summer.</i> <i>Thorny, winter-hardy and thicket forming.</i> <i>Tolerates dry conditions and most soil conditions.</i>	<i>The plums are eaten fresh and used in jellies and preserves, and are also consumed by many kinds of mammals and birds.</i> <i>Grown for erosion control, spreading by root sprouts.</i>