



**Scientific Name:** *Acacia occidentalis*

**Common Name:** Sonoran cat claw

**Botanical Family:** Fabaceae

**Synonyms:** *Senegalia occidentalis*

**Botanical Characteristics:**

*Acacia occidentalis* is a large shrub or small tree that grows 15-20 feet tall and 20-30 feet wide. It has an appearance similar to *Acacia greggii*, but often grows larger and has finer foliage and branches (1). Stems contain curved, sharp spines (1). *A. occidentalis* also has medium to dark green pinnately compound leaves with greater than 6 pairs of leaflets per pinnae (compared to the 2-6 pairs found on the each pinnae of *A. greggii*) (1). A key characteristic of *A. occidentalis* is the presence of a brown-grey gland on the leaf petiole which is usually between the base of the leaf and the first 2 pinnae (1). Foliage is evergreen, though it may lose leaves during cold weather. Flowers appear in mid-spring, are fragrant and globose (“pom poms” type) with creamy white filaments that extend beyond the tiny petals. Fruit is a dry dehiscent legume pod.

Compound: Aca occ

Geographic Origin: Mexican Desert

Ecozone Origin: Nearctic

Biome Origin:

**Natural History:**

*Acacia occidentalis* grows natively Mexico from Sonora into Northern Sinaloa and in the northwestern part of Mexico (2). It grows in desert or dry shrublands (2). This plant is anecdotally reported to be cultivated outdoors in the Phoenix and Tucson, AZ areas as well as throughout south and western Texas (3).

**Cultivation Notes:**

Very little information is known about this plant beyond its distribution. However, it appears to grow primarily along ephemeral rivers (xeroriparian washes) in subtropical Mexico. As such, it is considered very drought tolerant and tolerant to poor quality soils with pH from neutral to mildly alkaline (3). It is also believed to perform best in full sun with some tolerance for partial shade. Anecdotally, it is reported to grow from Zone 7a-11 (3), though its native range suggests it is best suited for Zone 9b (-3.9°C to -1.1°C) to 10a (-1.1°C to 1.7°C) (2). This species can be propagated from seed (3). Harvest seed from fully dry pods in the fall-winter, store and then direct sow in early spring (3). Pretreatment by scarification increases germination success (3).

**Ethnobotany:**

Beyond its use as a landscape ornamental tree for xeriscaping (3), little information is known about the uses of this plant.

Height: 16 - 20 feet

Width: 20-30 feet

Growth Rate: Slow Growing

Grow Season: Summer

Flower Season:

Color: Yellow

Function: Screen

Spread: No

Allergen: Non-allergenic

Invasive: No

Toxicity: Benign

Hardy: moderate

Water Use: Moderate Water Use

**Resources:**

1. [Wild Sonora](http://wildsonora.com/species-profile/acacia-occidentalis) <http://wildsonora.com/species-profile/acacia-occidentalis>  
Retrieved June 13, 2024
2. [KEW](https://powo.science.kew.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:518281-1) <https://powo.science.kew.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:518281-1>  
Retrieved June 13, 2024
3. [Dave's Garden](https://davesgarden.com/guides/pf/go/55643) <https://davesgarden.com/guides/pf/go/55643>  
Retrieved June 13, 2024