Curl-leaf Mountain Mahogany in the Landscape

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Cercocarpus ledifolius
Curl-leaf mountain mahogany

**Description:** Curl-leaf mountain mahogany is a marvelous large shrub to small tree that would look good in any ornamental landscape, but is especially adapted for low-water landscapes. It is the only broadleaf evergreen tree in the Intermountain West, and as such it offers an interesting winter contrast to the standard landscape conifer. It achieves a rather gnarly and quite intriguing shape with age. Seeds have long, cork-screw, feather-like plumes that cover the tree, creating an almost fuzzy appearance from a distance. The leaves are distinctively aromatic, evergreen and, curled under, thus its common name.

**Cultural Requirements:**
- **Native habitat**
  - Dry hills and rocky slopes throughout the West at elevations from 5,000 to 10,000 feet
- **Soil**
  - Well drained, tolerates poor soil conditions; prefers coarse, rocky slopes; pH 6.0 to 9.0
- **Cold Tolerance**
  - Zones 3-8
- **Drought Tolerance**
  - High
- **Salt Tolerance**
  - Unknown
- **Sun/Shade Preference**
  - Full sun to part shade
- **Transplanting**
  - Deep tap root makes it difficult to transplant
- **Propagation**
  - Seed or hardwood stem cuttings
- **Maintenance**
  - Prune in winter; tolerates hedging or shearing
- **Problems**
  - Browsed by deer
**Landscape Value:**
- **Use in the Landscape**: Use as a screen or for reclamation, soil stabilization, cover for wildlife; becomes multi-stemmed as a seedling; it needs training to achieve a single-trunk tree form.
- **Leaves**: Broadleaf evergreen; shiny, dark green and leathery
- **Flowers**: Small, inconspicuous, pale rose

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- **Color**          |     |     |      |      |     |      |     |
- **Fruit (seedheads)**: Long, dry achene with a 2- to 3-inch plume attached
- **Form**: Upright shrubby
- **Texture**: Coarse
- **Ultimate Size**: 8 to 15 feet
- **Rate of Growth**: Slow
- **Plant Community**: Parkland, pinyon-juniper, shrub steppe, mountain brush
- **Availability**: Utah's Choice selection (visit [http://www.utahschoice.org/natives/wheretobuy](http://www.utahschoice.org/natives/wheretobuy) for more information)
- **Cultivars**: None of ornamental value

**Propagation**

To start seed indoors soak seed in hydrogen peroxide for up to 24 hours. Rinse well. Cold, moist stratify for 30 to 60 days. Sow seed into container and cover with ¼ inch soil. To sow seed outdoors, use a generous amount of seed and cover with ¼ inch of soil. Sow in fall and watch for germinated seedlings the following spring. Cuttings should be collected in the spring from the previous season’s growth.

**Additional Photos**

Photo credits: Roger Kjelgren
References


This fact sheet belongs to a series of fact sheets about Intermountain West native trees, shrubs, perennials, and grasses called “Native Plants in the Landscape.” Look for others in the series by visiting http://extension.usu.edu/htm/publications, then clicking on ‘Horticulture’ and ‘Native Plants’.

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