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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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Apr</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Color</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fruit (seedheads)</strong></td>
<td>Long, dry achene with a 2- to 3-inch plume attached</td>
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<td><strong>Form</strong></td>
<td>Upright shrubby</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Texture</strong></td>
<td>Coarse</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ultimate Size</strong></td>
<td>8 to 15 feet</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rate of Growth</strong></td>
<td>Slow</td>
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<td><strong>Plant Community</strong></td>
<td>Parkland, pinyon-juniper, shrub steppe, mountain brush</td>
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<td><strong>Availability</strong></td>
<td>Utah’s Choice selection (visit <a href="http://www.utahschoice.org/natives/wheretobuy">http://www.utahschoice.org/natives/wheretobuy</a> for more information)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cultivars</strong></td>
<td>None of ornamental value</td>
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**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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