

## Sweet Acacia

Huisache, Mealy wattle, Cassie

### *Acacia Farnesiana*

*Mimosa farnesiana*,

*Fabaceae*, (previously *mimoaceae*)

**Basic Description:** A multi-trunked tree that grows 15-20 feet tall. It has sharp thorns on branches and trunk. The leaves are light green to gray-green, ferny in appearance and finely divided. It is a deciduous perennial.



**Bloom & Fruit Description:** Blooms January through April and may have a second bloom in Fall. Has a small, very fragrant, orange-yellow flower in globuse (round) head. Pods are reddish-brown to black, rounded, and woody.

**Cultural information/Uses/Human Interaction:** There is much folklore surrounding this species. Every part of the tree is used widely in folk medicine to treat an endless number of ailments from sore throat to diarrhea to typhoid. It is cultivated in Southern Europe for its use in high-end perfume production known as *Cassie*. The pods are used as black leather dye and contain 23% tannin used for tanning leather. A gummy substance from the pods can be used as a cement adhesive. The alkaloid contained in the seeds is used in Brazil to kill rabid dogs. Its sap is considered a superior form of the Gum Arabic compound used in art. The sap also contains saccharides and glycoproteins used for flavoring sodas and other processed foods. It has been used as an ingredient for arrow poison in the Ivory Coast region. The wood is hard and durable; used for fences, pegs and plows. Bark, leaves and roots contain astringent used in medicine.

The common name Huisache is from Nahuatl (part of Aztec language/culture) and means many thorns.

**Communication:** Studies on plant communication have included acacia. It appears that if browsed by herbivores or attacked by other pests, the chemical composition changes within the tree being attacked. Very soon after other acacia nearby also go through a chemical change that makes them less appealing. No connection through soil or root systems was determined. It is possible they are communicating through the release of pheromones as an alert message.

**Distribution/Range/Habitat:** Maybe native to tropical America, but widely introduced to other regions and attributed to other areas including Punjab, in India. Currently in the U.S. in AL, AZ, CA, FL, GA, HI, LA, MS, NM and TX. It is also in Mexico.

**Cultural Requirements:** It is drought tolerant, and can handle full sun. Soil preferences include sand, loam, clay, and caliches. It prefers dry tropical climates, but can grow along sandy riverbeds or dry plains.

**Propagation:** Can propagate by seed or cutting. In the wild it creates dense thickets through suckers.

**Wildlife/Plant relationships:** Commonly bee pollinated and may add flavor to honey.

**Disease/Pathology/toxins:** Susceptible to **acacia beetle**. Can be a mild allergen.

**Status:** X

**Resources:**

US Dept. of Agriculture

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, The University of Texas, Austin

Lycaeum