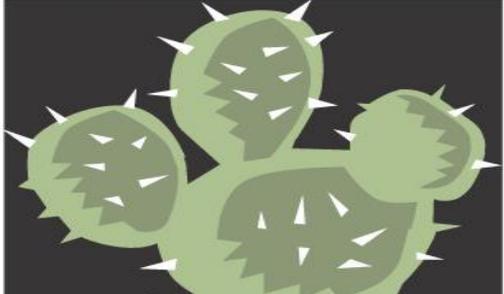


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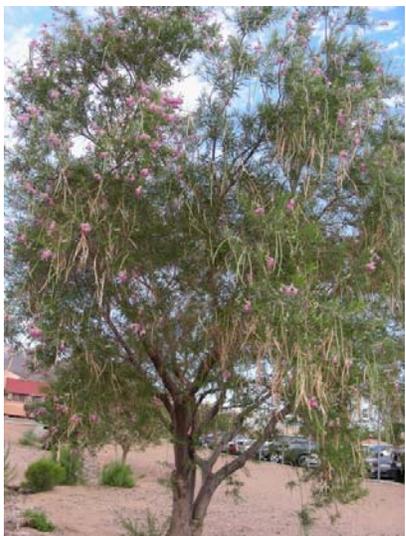
E d u c a t i o n C o a l i t i o n

Desert willow - *Chilopsis linearis*

Spanish: Mimbre

Other names: Desert willow, Flowering willow, Willow-leaved catalpa, Trumpet flower; Desert Catalpa, False Willow, Jano

The Desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*) is a small, deciduous tree (15-40 ft) of the Bignoniaceae (Trumpet-Creeper) Family and related to the Yellowbells (*Tecoma stans*) – not to willows, though it resembles them. It is very drought and even salt tolerant and has an open, spreading crown and resembles willows.



Figures1&2: Tree left; flowers right

Its distribution range falls into the desert Southwest of the USA and Northern Mexico. In the wild the Desert willow prefers to grow in or near arroyos (desert washes) and resembles there more a big shrub, thus serving well in flood and erosion control. This deep rooted phreatophyte, a plant that indicates that water is not always too far below the surface, grows rapidly and is easy to maintain and therefore liked as an ornamental tree. Especially its showy dark-pink to purple, funnel shaped flowers make the tree very attractive. They are orchid-like, lightly scented and present from May through October. They attract hummingbirds, butterflies, birds and native bees. The flowers, leaves, or bark can be used to make a tea and treat coughs. They can also be used to treat athlete's foot and

scratch wounds. In the past, blossoms and seed pods provided a food source for the Native Americans, and the bark fibers were used to make shirts and nets.



Fig3: Desert willow flowers and seedpods

The seedpods are slender and 6-10 inches long. They remain dangling from the branches throughout the winter, which helps in the identification of the tree. The long, narrow leaves have a leathery texture.

The native Americans used the tree also to make baskets and bows from the wood. The stems also make good fence poles.



References and more information:

- Desert USA @ <http://www.desertusa.com/flora/desert-willow.html>

- Journal of the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension @
<http://ag.arizona.edu/maricopa/garden/html/pubs/0104/willow.html>

- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center @
http://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=CHLI2

- Medicinal Plants of the Southwest, New Mexico State University.
<http://medplant.nmsu.edu/chilopsis.shtm>

- Tree USA @
<http://www.treesusa.com/Plantinfo/Shade/Templates/Willow,%20desert.pdf>

- USDA plant profiles @ <http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=chli2>



Chihuahuan Desert Education Coalition

Desert willow - *Chilopsis linearis*

Questions:

- Is the desert willow a willow, as its name implies?
- To which local plant is it related?
- How do you best recognize the Desert willow in the wild?
- Name three main uses of the flowers, leaves, and bark of the plant.
- What common uses did the wooden parts of the tree have for Native Americans?
- Why is this tree a preferred landscape tree in the US Desert Southwest?



Desert willow - *Chilopsis linearis*

Questions & Answers:

- Is the desert willow a willow, as its name implies?
 - o No, it belongs to the Trumpet-creeper family (Bignoniaceae)
- To which local plant is it related?
 - o The Yellowbells (*Tecoma stans*)
- How do you best recognize the Desert willow in the wild?
 - o It grows preferably near and in arroyos, and its long seed pods remain on the tree for an extending period of time and dangle in the wind on the branches.
- Name three main uses of the flowers, leaves, and bark of the plant.
 - o They can be brewed into a tea to treat coughs; used to cure fungus infections (athletes food) and clean fresh wounds; flowers can be eaten.
- What common uses did the wooden parts of the tree have for Native Americans?
 - o They were used to make baskets and bows.
- Why is this tree a preferred landscape tree in the US Desert Southwest?
 - o It grows fast, has very attractive flowers throughout the summer, and attracts Hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies.

