

# IRONWOOD



Ironwood is a legume or “bean tree” that produces one or more peanut-like seeds in each pod after pollination and spring flowering. The flowers, green and mature seeds are all edible in many forms.

Often Ironwood and Palo Verde flower at the same time- both flowers are edible and delicious. Green pods are often ready to harvest when Saguaro fruit is ripe.

Ironwood has SHARP spines!



All legume seeds benefit from soaking before consuming, both to reduce anti-nutrients which help keep seeds safe from predation, and also to make them easier to digest.

*below: flowers, green pods with fresh Saguaro fruit, dry pods and mature seeds, range of pod sizes*

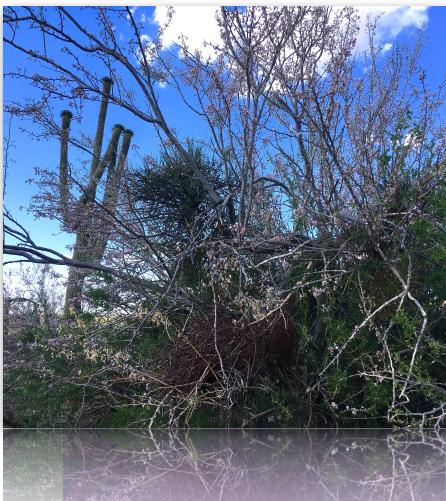


Unlike Mesquite and Palo Verde, mature Ironwood seeds are soft enough to eat as is, but benefit from soaking, seasoning and toasting. Green seeds can be cooked and served in their pods as desert edamame. Mature seeds can be sprouted, tough seed coats removed, and incorporated into sautés and stir-frys. Mature seeds can be ground into flour.



*above: parboiled green pods; cooked green seeds, sprouts; toasted in a seed mix; stir-fried with onion, herbs*

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Ironwoods are a keystone species of the Sonoran Desert and trees can live for over a thousand years. They are also a staple protein-rich food source for many animals during “dry summer”- the hottest, driest season of the year before summer monsoon.



Ironwoods are endangered throughout their range in both the US and Mexico ranging from deforestation for grazing land, fuelwood cutting, urban development and carvings for the tourist trade.

Sacred to the Seri and used for traditional hand-carved art, many Ironwoods are cut down to supply the market for faux Seri carvings.



above: Seri Ironwood carving; demonstration of fast growth of Ironwood irrigated by street run-off

Ironwoods are a prime species for Sonoran Desert Food Forest Restoration

For climate resilience and drought tolerance, the importance of replanting cannot be overstated in urban and suburban spaces in and around Tucson. Ironwoods are virtually evergreen, losing their leaves just prior to spring flowering, and are wonderful for shading east and west sides of buildings, and north sides if in frost-free areas. Planting Ironwoods adjacent to mulched water harvesting basins yields a faster growing tree than those growing in the wild.