

Common Name: Quaking Aspen
Scientific Name: *Populus tremuloides*



Tom DeGomez

Tom DeGomez, Area Extension Agent, Natural Resources, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Coconino and Mohave Counties

Quaking aspen has the widest distribution of any native tree species in North America. It is found from northern Alaska to Newfoundland in the north, and central Mexico in its most southern range. As such, it is one of the most widely planted landscape trees in the communities of Williams, Flagstaff, Show Low, Pinetop-Lakeside and Eagar-Springerville. Since

it can grow from 6 to 10 thousand foot elevations it also thrives in the high elevation towns of Summerhaven, Greer and Alpine.

This fast growing tree is small to medium sized, 20 to 60 feet tall, with thin crowns that are oval to broadly columnar. It has smooth whitish to gray, thin bark and is prized for its beautiful golden-yellow fall leaves that shimmer in the wind.

With its wide adaptability, aspen can be grown in Sunset Climate Zones 1-7 and is cold hardy to USDA Climate Zone 2. Roots are invasive and sucker freely so it is not recommended for streets or near water/sewer lines. It is too invasive for small yards. It requires frequent watering, but soils must be well drained. Its roots are intolerant of flooding and compaction.

Aspen are excellent as an accent tree singly or as clumps in yards and are good for naturalized areas where spreading is desirable. Do not use in parks or other public access areas where bark can be damaged or where suckering will ruin lawns and gardens. Provide mulch or shade to the roots to improve growth.

Aspen is a short lived tree, rarely living beyond 70 years. It is short lived often due to infection from one of the many canker diseases that attacks the bark. To prevent canker diseases protect from sapsuckers, elk and deer when young to avoid scarring the bark. It is also susceptible to the clearwinged American hornet moth, oystershell scale, and tent caterpillars.

When planted in clumps of 2 to 5 trees, space at least 3 to 5 feet apart. Prune to remove suckers.

If you can successfully grow this tree it will bring you many hours of enjoyment sitting under its fluttering leaves on a beautiful, sunny Arizona day.

REFERENCES

DeGomez, T.E. 2004. Beyond the Ponderosa: Successful Landscape Trees for Higher Elevations in the Southwest, 2nd Edition. J. D. Bailey (Ed.). Flagstaff Community Tree Board, Flagstaff, Arizona. 40 color plates, 108 pp.

Common Name: Cactus Wren
Scientific Name: *Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*



Dan L. Fischer

Dan L. Fischer – Author of *Early Southwest Ornithologists, 1528-1900*, University of Arizona Press

The common name of the Cactus Wren certainly typifies the very habitat in which it resides in the arid Southwest. They reach their highest densities among several species of cholla that are found in abundance in desert scrub communities. Possessing remarkable agility, the wren is able to maneuver through masses of thickets of thorny and barbed plants that seem completely impenetrable. Not confined to the branches of plants in its search for food, it is more commonly observed running along the ground in search of insects similar to other desert birds or thrashers of nearly the same size. In rocky situations they often overturn the smaller pebbles and stones in search of insect morsels.

The conspicuous Cactus Wren, our state bird, represents the largest wren occurring north of the Mexican border. (An incidental

note, the bird image shown here is perched on a Saguaro by the fruit of our state flower). With a body length exceeding eight inches, the upper parts are predominately brown with a contrasting white strip or supercilium extending from the slightly curved beak beyond each eye. The back is marked with black and white stripes and the underparts are much lighter with small to large black spots. The brown wings and tail are barred with white, and the tail, when spread, also shows white tips on all the feathers. The eye, on close inspection, displays a clear, orange to blood red iris.

Cactus Wrens are heard mostly in spring when their vocalizations for which they are most noted are displayed with a unmusical “char-char-char-char,” likened to an old car that is difficult or unsuccessful to start. It is often repeated and quite monotonous. The birds can also be quite noisy uttering various sharp and coarse notes when defending their territory, or especially, when gathering in alarm around a newly discovered snake or other predator.

Quite contrary to most birds, they generally build their nests in the open with virtually no concealment within the spiny arms of cholla cactus. By late February several nests are built, often within the confines of the same thorny plant or cactus, but with only one used to lay eggs and raise their young. The others may be used by the adults at various times. In years of good food availability, two or even three broods may be successfully raised. The nest, a long horizontal, almost cylindrical, enclosed structure with one conspicuous side entrance, is comprised mostly of grass and other fine plant materials lined with feathers. Usually three to five eggs make up a clutch with the female incubating about sixteen days, followed with the young fledging in about three weeks. The young are called back to the nest by the parents for several nights, and as the nest usually shrinks in size as they leave for the day, it again swells or expands as the birds, one by one and now fully grown, hop back into the confining enclosure for the evening.

The wren was first described by French ornithologist Baron Frédéric de Lafresnaye from a specimen sent to him from somewhere in Mexico in 1835. It was later included into our fauna by Captain John Porter McCown (1815-1879) who collected a specimen while posted along the Rio Grande in south Texas during and after the war with Mexico. He sent his specimens to prominent New York ornithologist George Newbold Lawrence (1806-1895) where he published the account in 1851.