

Featured Plant

Common Name: HoneyLocust
Scientific Name: *Gleditsia triacanthos*



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Selecting the right tree species for your particular needs is not always easy. Aside from appearance, you should also consider space requirements, evergreen vs. deciduous, insect

and disease susceptibility, and irrigation requirements. The honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) is an excellent deciduous tree for both commercial and residential plantings across Arizona (suitable for USDA Plant Hardiness Zones 3-9). It has few pests, an interesting branching pattern, tolerates our summer heat, and has moderate irrigation requirements.

Honeylocust is native to the eastern U.S. from eastern Texas north to South Dakota east to Pennsylvania and back south roughly following the Appalachian Mountains then south to Mississippi and Louisiana. Over its native range, it seldom grows in pure stands and tends to prefer the river valleys and floodplains. Even though it's from the humid eastern U.S., it performs well in Arizona.

Honeylocust is a member of the pea/bean (Leguminosae) family. It produces seeds in long, flat, twisted pods. The seeds have impermeable coats and do not readily germinate until the seed coat has been mechanically broken or it has passed through the gut of an animal. This is true for many seeds in this family: mesquite, palo verde, catclaw, lupine, etc. Native grown honeylocust saplings produce woody spines which are undesirable in landscape situations. As these trees mature, they tend

to produce fewer spines. However, when cuttings are grown from thorn-less portions of mature trees they tend to remain thornless. The nursery industry has used this to produce honeylocust cultivars that have no thorns and have desirable growth forms and/or interesting foliage colors. These are grown from vegetative cuttings or are grafted onto seedling rootstock. Every once in a while you may see a mature honeylocust tree with spines. These individuals were probably grown from seed.

Honey locusts are adapted to salty and/or alkaline soils making them a good choice for arid areas. Once mature, they have a lacey canopy which provides good visibility through the canopy and grass can grow right up to the trunk. The sweet smelling flowers are much favored by bees and the juicy pulp between the seeds within the pods is relished by cattle and wildlife. The wood is very hard, very heavy, and resistant to decay. It is used occasionally for furniture, fence posts and railroad ties. Because Arizona is outside of honeylocust's native range, there are relatively few pest management issues.

Featured Bird

Common Name: White-crowned Sparrow
Scientific Name: *Zonotrichia leucophrys*



Dan L. Fischer

Dan L. Fischer – Author of *Early Southwest Ornithologists, 1728-1900*, University of Arizona Press

It is rare to observe the White-crowned Sparrow anywhere or any time in Arizona except during their migration or winter. Some exceptions could be during some years when their summer breeding might be limited to the few higher northern mountains of the state with elevations nearing 11,000 feet. Although common in winter throughout most of southern portions of North America, its breeding range

is well to the north including the extreme northern states from both coasts to the Arctic, the higher western mountains and the northern region along the west coast. Once its seasonal fall and winter movement south begins, this sparrow becomes one of the most abundant during this period in Arizona.

The initial arrival of the White-crowned Sparrow to its southern winter residence in Arizona and south into Mexico is most often first noted by its clear, lovely song which it sings throughout this season. During this period the birds flock and feed and their continued presence is noted as much time is spent singing. Before moving south and still in their nesting area, the first year birds, in their early formative months, learn and perfect vocalization characteristics that ultimately produce a variation or dialect nearly matching their father and other nearby males.

These rather large, pale, adult White-crowned Sparrows arrive in fall after completing a fresh molt revealing a handsome basic plumage, and, as its common name implies, with distinctive

alternating black and white crown strips. The young first year birds on arrival, however, are quite distinct from the adults by displaying brown and buffy crown strips, but by early spring they begin their molt, transforming them into an alternate plumage with aspects of an adult. Two Greek terms, *leucos*, "white" and *ophrys*, "eyebrow" comprise the specific name which describes the white line above the eye.

Although he never visited North America, German naturalist Johann Reinhold Forster (1729-1798), is credited for describing the White-crowned Sparrow. In 1772, while in England, he described this sparrow in a publication which included several other North American birds. The specimens were sent by Hudson's Bay Company employees located near the Severn River area which drains east into the great, shallow Hudson Bay. In the same year, Forster's energies and contributions to science were again noted for he, along with his son Johann Georg Adam, joined Captain Cook's second voyage around the world to study South African, Antarctic, New Zealand and Pacific island birds.