

Featured Plant

Common Name: Sweet Acacia
Scientific Name: *Acacia smallii*, *Acacia minuta*, *Acacia farnesiana*

Mohamed Al-Deghairi



Curt Peters, Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development, University of Arizona, CALS Cooperative Extension, Pima County

The versatile Sweet Acacia is a medium sized tree known for its drought tolerance. It is originally found in the Southwestern United States, Caribbean, and Central America and the name comes from the unmistakable fragrance of the ½" bright yellow puff ball flowers when it blooms. The bark is rough and dark colored. Young growth will have numerous straight, whitish thorns, which become less plentiful on old growth. Its

leaves are medium green in color and consist of tiny leaflets that give the tree a feathery appearance. Mature trees can reach the height of 30'-35' but are generally found in the 15'-25' range. It is considered semi-deciduous, retaining leaves in warm winters and dropping them in cold winters. Sweet Acacia does best in full sun and tolerates reflected sun and heat. It is adaptable to different soil types but prefers good drainage.

In addition to the showy, fragrant flowers, Sweet Acacia is a popular landscape tree because of its versatility. It can have a single trunk or a vase shaped multiple trunk. It does well with infrequent deep irrigation in a xeriscape (or natural landscape), and also does well in a frequent irrigation setting near turf. It can be used as an accent/specimen tree, in a group, or even as a thicket because of its thorny branches. It also grows well in confined spaces, such as large planter boxes, and parking lot strips, or in wide open spaces.

Tree care consists mostly of pruning. The Sweet Acacia is a fast grower and is prone to producing many sucker branches. Regular pruning is required in order to maintain shape and to thin the canopy to prevent wind

damage. Insect problems are infrequent – immature trees may be damaged by sucking insects (e.g. aphids) that produce little lasting damage. Mature trees may be attacked by Acacia beetles which can girdle branches up to 3" in diameter.

There is much debate in the horticultural community about the exact classification of Sweet Acacia. Certain characteristics, such as flowering time and cold hardiness, are so varied that most consider the Sweet Acacia to be two different species. *Acacia smallii*/*Acacia minuta* is more cold tolerant (to 15°F) and blooms from February to March. *Acacia farnesiana* is cold hardy to only 25°F and tends to bloom from October through March. Most other characteristics are indistinguishable between the two species, and they are often grown and sold simply as "Sweet Acacia" without regard to the species distinction.

Featured Bird

Common Name: Barn Swallow
Scientific Name: *Hirundo rustica*

Dan L. Fischer



Dan L. Fischer - Author of *Early Southwest Ornithologists, 1738-1900*, University of Arizona Press

Anyone who is interested in birds generally admire and appreciate the presence, agility and graceful flight of Barn Swallows. They are one of a group of migrating birds that is perhaps most noticeably fixed on our calendar by their arrival and departure. We know within a very few days of their summer appearance to nest and their subsequent exodus to wintering areas southward. Exceptions do occur, however, depending largely on weather and food sources. As insectivores they are very beneficial and

depend entirely on their ability to migrate where their food sources are available. Although cosmopolitan in their distribution, some of the birds in the western hemisphere of the Americas have yearly transects that may range somewhere within the extremes of summer nesting above the Arctic Circle in the far north, to wintering areas in Tierra del Fuego in the distant south.

The mystical seasonal comings and goings of swallows have been noted over the centuries in the literature of early folk-lore even during Aristotle's time. It was believed then that swallows in winter "plunge into the mud, become torpid, and hibernate like frogs" or that when "in full flight, suddenly dive under water and disappear beneath the surface." The notions of these actions have long been proven to be false. During this intervening period, however, much has been learned about other birds to the extent that a few other species do indeed become torpid or hibernate during winter.

The distribution of nesting Barn Swallows in Arizona is somewhat limited to the eastern half of the state, especially in the southeastern portion. Arriving in late March or early April these locations are generally near open fields and grasslands where mud and suitable structures are available to build their nests. Their nests are usually placed under an overhang such as eaves and against

vertical walls where mud can adhere or on a horizontal ledge or beam. Both sexes build their nest with mud that is generally mixed with straw or horsehair to help bind the mixture together. Feathers line the completed nest. By the end of April the first set of 3-7 eggs are laid, then, quickly following the young fledging, a second set is laid so two broods are raised prior to their departure in early September. During this period the graceful birds spend much of their day in the air, dashing and wheeling through the sky gathering insects. When returning to feed their nestlings, they are met amid much excitement, twittering and loud outcries. The young after leaving their nest and while learning learn to hunt, are often fed in mid-air by their parents.

The Swedish naturalist Carolus Linnaeus, named the "father of biological taxonomy," described the genus of this bird in Latin as *hirundo*, "a swallow" with the species scientific name *rustica*, "rustic" or "belonging to the country, rural." He applied this name in 1758, while at same time comparing it to the European House Martin, to which he gave the Latin name of *urbica*, "pertaining to the city." Both swallows occur in Europe and were the first of several to be recognized and officially named. The common species name for this swallow was applied because of its close association and adaption to barn nesting sites in America.