

# Featured Plant

**Common Name:** Desert Willow  
**Scientific Name:** *Chilopsis linearis*



Jeff Schalaus



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The desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*) is an excellent drought tolerant tree for many areas of Arizona. Desert willow is not a willow at all, but a close relative of the catalpa tree and a member of the trumpet vine family (*Bignoniaceae*). This deciduous, native tree/shrub can be found along dry washes and seasonal creeks in desert, chaparral, and grassland habitats between 1,500 and 5,000 foot elevations. High elevation populations are hardy to 0 degrees F and require little water once established.

The desert willow is very graceful with an airy, open canopy. Hence, it does not make dense shade or a highly effective windbreak, but does make an attractive, multi-trunked specimen in a low water use landscape. In the wild, they can grow to 20 feet tall by 20 feet wide. With irrigation, they can get slightly larger.

The narrow, curving leaves are between 3 and 5 inches long and 1/4 to 1 inch wide. They look very graceful but have a surprisingly tough, leathery texture. Desert willows are best known for their showy flowers. These appear in clusters on branch tips from late spring to early summer and can vary in color from white to pink to deep purple. Flowers of native populations are often pale lavender with yellow spots or stripes in the throat of the trumpet-shaped blossoms. With some additional irrigation, they can bloom through September. In addition, the flowers have a sweet fragrance that attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.

Long, narrow seedpods form after blooms have died. These persist on the tree through the winter and split open to release hundreds of fuzzy seeds. The seeds are viable and may germinate in a moist seedbed. I suppose, if there is a downside to desert willow, it is the pods and seeds. Excessively orderly gardeners may think them untidy.

Commercial growers have selected individuals from the wild, cloned them, and market these cultivars as named varieties that have showier flowers or smaller stature. Some of the newer varieties are Barranco, Burgundy Lace, White Star, Pink Star, Lucretia Hamilton, Warren Jones, and Lois Adams (a podless variety). There is also a Chitalpa (*Chitalpa tashkentensis*): a hybrid between the desert willow and the catalpa (*Catalpa bignonioides*).

# Featured Bird

**Common Name:** Loggerhead Shrike  
**Scientific Name:** *Lanius Ludovicianus*



Arizona Game and Fish Department

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Have you ever been out on a hike and found a grasshopper impaled to a barbed wire fence or a mesquite thorn? The responsible party was most likely a hungry Loggerhead Shrike. These birds are year-round residents of Arizona and, unlike other shrike species, only inhabit North America. Their preferred habitat includes semi-open areas. Approximately 8-10 inches in size, the Loggerhead Shrike has a gray back, white throat, whitish chest and a distinguishing black mask that wraps around over the bill. The wings are black with a white patch and the black tail has white outer feathers. Birds with similar coloration that may be confused with the Loggerhead Shrike are the Northern Shrike and Northern Mockingbird. The name "loggerhead" comes from a disproportionately large head to smaller body size. The bill of the loggerhead shrike is stout with a hook at the end. This feature makes it an accomplished predator. Interestingly, the Loggerhead Shrike is a song bird, but displays hawk-like behavior. Their main source of food is large insects such as grasshoppers and locusts. During the winter they will survive on small rodents and birds. Loggerhead Shrikes use lookout perches to scan the country and then swoop down to catch their prey. Because they do not have the strong legs and talons that raptors do, Loggerhead Shrikes impale their prey on thorns or barbed wire before eating it. This can also serve as a means of food storage when hunting is good. Impaling their prey on thorns earned them the nick name of "butcher bird."