

# Trees

While the preserve lacks forest in the traditional sense of the word, there are trees here. Palo verdes dominate, but there are other species as well, especially near the washes. Most of the trees here are small, and many are more shrubby in nature, especially when in a natural setting with no prior irrigation. Many introduced and formerly irrigated species along the golf course features are not faring well. A number of these dead and dying trees were removed during the landscaping work in the spring of 2022. All of the trees in this guide are members of the legume family, important to wildlife for food and shelter. Their roots form a symbiotic relationship with bacteria, which facilitates the transfer of nitrogen from the atmosphere to the soil, thus enriching it. Most are drought deciduous, dropping some or all of their leaves during dry spells.

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**Common name:** Blue Palo Verde

**Scientific name:** *Parkinsonia florida*

**Notes:** Palo verdes are the most numerous tree species in the preserve. Many in the natural areas of the preserve were not irrigated and are small or medium in size. Some of the irrigated ones are quite large. The two species can be difficult to distinguish when lacking flowers, fruit, and leaves. This species, the blue palo verde, has all yellow flowers and comparatively larger leaves. See also the next page.



**Common name:** Little-leaved Palo Verde

**Scientific name:** *Parkinsonia microphylla*

**Notes:** Little-leaved palo verdes (also known as foothill palo verdes) are as common as blue palo verdes in the preserve. The leaves are comparatively smaller and the flowers have a lighter yellow color with one whitish petal. Little-leaved palo verdes have bumpier seed pods, and the blue palo verde smoother ones. Both species have green bark, allowing them to photosynthesize even in dry periods when their leaves drop.



**Common name:** Velvet Mesquite

**Scientific name:** *Prosopis velutina*

**Notes:** These are probably the largest trees in the preserve, especially those that used to receive irrigation. Mesquites hybridize easily and many in the preserve are hybrids of native and introduced species. Look for tiny hairs on the leaves, which indicate a native velvet mesquite. These primarily grow in thickets along the washes in the preserve, though they can be found along the golf course features as well. They can be distinguished from the similar catclaw acacia by their paired, straight spines and from the whitethorn acacia by their larger leaflets. A few honey mesquites can also be found within Vistoso Trails.



**Common name:** Desert Ironwood

**Scientific name:** *Olneya tesota*

**Notes:** There are a few of these scattered throughout the preserve, some likely planted for the golf course. New sections of bark have a distinctive white-green color with thorns. Spring flowers are a beautiful pale pink to purple. Some leaves yellow and fall off during dry periods. Their wood is extremely hard and dense.



*Photo credit: Eliseu Cavalcante*

**Common name:** Catclaw Acacia

**Scientific name:** *Senegalia greggii*

**Notes:** Typically small and shrubby, these acacias have thorns shaped a bit like a cat's claw. They produce elongated clusters of tiny yellow flowers in the spring, yielding twisted seed pods later in the year. Tarantula hawks, butterflies, wasps, bees, and others have been observed taking nectar from the flowers of these trees in the preserve. Also known as the "wait-a-minute bush" for its thorns' propensity to snag clothing.



**Common name:** Whitethorn Acacia

**Scientific name:** *Vachellia constricta*

**Notes:** Generally small and shrubby without irrigation, these trees have distinctive white thorns and round, yellow clusters of small flowers. There are a few formerly irrigated trees that have become quite large, though some of those may actually be the closely related sweet acacia. The whitethorn acacia pictured here is growing above a wash and was never irrigated. These acacias can lose almost all of their leaves in dry periods, revealing spindly looking reddish branches with white thorns.