



*Handwritten: May 1 1985*  
Hackberry (genus *Celtis*) belongs to the elm family. Two species of hackberry are found in the Desert Foothills: desert or spiny hackberry and western or netleaf hackberry.

Desert hackberry is not a tree, but a shrub from 3- to 10-feet high — which is so intricately branched that it may form dense thickets on the desert floor or in washes and canyons. Short, specialized branchlets form inch-long spines on the regular branches. Bark is usually formed only near the base of the plant, or not at all.

The leaves are small and remain on the shrub during the winter, making this shrub evergreen. The leaves may or may not have small teeth around the edges. The small, yellowish flowers are seldom noticed, but produce considerable nectar and are attractive to bees and nectar-eating birds.

The small, berry-like fruits are enjoyed by many species of birds and some small animals. The dense thickets offer especially good cover for the Gambel's quail. The spiny branches exclude the larger birds, but are good nesting sites for the small birds.

The netleaf hackberry is commonly up to 30 feet tall. The tallest known hackberry is in New Mexico and is 74 feet tall. Another one, not quite so tall, is in the Gila National Forest in Arizona. This species sheds its leaves in the winter.

Netleaf hackberry is restricted to areas where there is a year-round water supply, either in the form of a stream or shallow underground water. They do not grow in the open desert. It has no spines and the bark is well-developed. The leaves are medium sized, sharp pointed (usually with smooth edges, but sometimes sawtoothed).

An outstanding characteristic of the leaves that helps to identify this hackberry is that the two sides of the ~~base~~ *base or opposite sides* of the mid vein are unequal in size or asymmetric. The underside of the leaf is pale green, and the prominent veins form a network. The fruit is somewhat larger than that of the spiny hackberry,

orange or reddish and sweet. These fruits were used by the Indians, and the tree trunks are often utilized for fence posts. The fruits are food for birds and small mammals.

There is a leaf-gall insect that produces a globular, somewhat woody, gall near the center of the leaves of the netleaf hackberry. These are so numerous that the tree often can be recognized by their presence.