

Palo verde: adaptable under duress

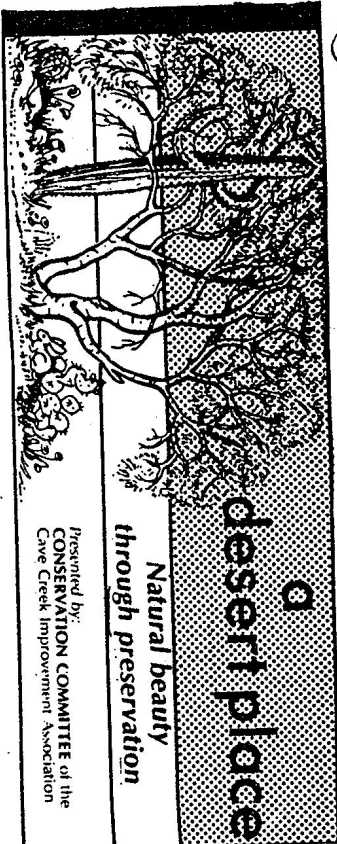
Foothills Sentinel 24 Apr. 1985

Palo verde trees, those pale-green bearers of slight — but welcome — shade, evoke questions from the newcomer: Where are the leaves, and why is the bark green?

The palo verde (meaning green pale in Spanish) is yet another marvel of nature's adaptability under duress; leaves in wetter climates serve to direct rainfall to the root system, absorb moisture through their surfaces and to produce chlorophyll.

In drier climates, usefulness dwindles; nature radically decreases their size and transfers the ability to produce chlorophyll to another even more essential part, the bark. Thus the palo verde flourishes, adding considerably to the beauty and environment of the Sonoran desert.

Found only in Southern Arizona, Southeastern California and Northern Mexico, the yellow (foothills) and the blue palo verde are the two of seven species most likely to be encountered. Color is not the most reliable key to iden-



tification. Yellow palo verde bears yellow flowers with white banners; blue palo verde bears yellow flowers with yellow banners. Blues bloom first — usually beginning in April.

Pods (palo verdes are legume family members) of the yellow

are pinched between the seeds or beans; pods of the blue are not. Tiny leaflets of the yellow palo verde grows in pairs along a stem (rachis) about 6- to 8-inches long. In the blue, the stem is shorter, with two to three pairs of leaflets. The leaflets are quickly shed dur-

ing dry spells; the leafless stems and green bark of the limbs continue to manufacture food.

Each species lives 300 to 400 years. Drought-resistant and extremely hardy, the palo verde produces new shoots from the base of its trunk when a major limb is lost.

Palo verde seeds feed the quail and white-winged dove; they shelter young plants, including the immature saguaro. Their generalized root systems (tap root, plus feeder roots) resist soil erosion.

The palo verde — Arizona's state tree — is important, and an admirable element to the Arizona landscape.