

**Arizona sycamore**  
***Platanus wrightii***

Arizona sycamore is a tree loved by wildlife. In southeastern Arizona near the Mexican border, acorn woodpeckers fly noisily in and out of their holes; elf owls (the smallest owl in the world) peek out of their holes at night calling in their mates; and the elegant trogon nesting in the sycamore can be heard calling down the river canyon. Even coatimundi (in the raccoon family) nap, climb and hang from the sycamore, mostly making trouble.



*acorn woodpecker*



*elf owl peeking out*

This area, Cave Creek Canyon, is the most biologically diverse area in North America. It is a massive sky island that reaches high out of the desert surrounding it. The Rocky Mountains from the north, the Sierra Madre Mountains from Mexico, the Chihuahuan Desert, and the Sonoran Desert all emerge bringing along their flora and fauna with them. In Cave Creek, species that normally occur hundreds of miles apart find themselves close together, around a spring or eyeing the same nest hole.



*the elegant trogon*



*coatimundi snoozing*

And it's not just wildlife that benefit from Arizona sycamore. This tree is vitally important for erosion control in riparian habitats. The Arizona sycamore is one of the largest and most handsome deciduous trees in the Southwest. These big trees with their spreading whitish branches and huge, mottled trunks are conspicuous along desert valleys and canyons.

We have two Arizona sycamore, collected in Sedona and planted in 2017. One is in the Alpine Garden in bed 51. The other is in bed 132T, which is past the stone garden on a grassy sloped area by the stream. The latter is spreading out beautifully as you can see from the picture below. Facing the stream with lots of room for its irregular growth habit, it seems to feel at home. The Alpine Garden one is more restricted and has to deal with the interference of festival lights going up and coming down.



*happy by the stream*



*restricted in Alpine Garden*



*beautiful bark of a mature tree*

With climate change, riparian ecosystems are vulnerable in arid and semiarid areas in the Southwest. I hope our two Arizona sycamore trees will flourish here. We have the moisture that they need, and with global warming our climate could favour them in the future. Their closest cousin, California sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*), suffers from a fungus (anthracnose). This fungal disease thrives during wet spring weather, but it still occurs even in dry years. It infects the young leaves and twigs and results in premature defoliation.

We will keep an eye on our two Arizona sycamore trees and cross our fingers.

[http://southwestdesertflora.com/WebsiteFolders/All\\_Species/Platanaceae/Platanus%20wrightii,%20Arizona%20Sycamore.html](http://southwestdesertflora.com/WebsiteFolders/All_Species/Platanaceae/Platanus%20wrightii,%20Arizona%20Sycamore.html)

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1365-2486.2011.02588.x>

<https://www.pe.com/2012/07/13/master-gardener-saving-sycamore-trees-from-disease/>

[Cave Creek Canyon: Revealing the Heart of Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains - Edited by Wynne Brown and Reed Peters](#)