

NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY OF TEXAS

Lindheimer Chapter

PLANT OF THE MONTH
MAY, 2011

GOLDENBALL LEADTREE, LEUCAENA RETUSA



Young Goldenball Leadtree



Close-up of Flower

Goldenball Leadtree is a small tree or large shrub, up to 15 feet tall, native to the western part of the Edwards Plateau, the Davis and Chisos mountains and New Mexico, where it is found in rocky, limestone areas and dry canyons. It gets many small ($1/2$ " to $1\frac{1}{2}$ ") golden-yellow globe shaped blooms, mainly in spring but also intermittently through summer and into fall, especially after a rain. Butterflies and bees enjoy the flowers. Typical of plants in the legume family, it has small pods of seeds following the flowers. The attractive light green foliage is open enough to allow sun loving plants to grow beneath the tree.

In its native habitat, Goldenball Leadtree is usually found mixed with other small trees in scattered groups. It is heavily browsed by deer, leading to its scarcity. In the wild, it is often a multi-trunked tree, and some people consider this a preferred landscape form. However, it can also be trained to be a single-trunked tree. Its branches are thin and brittle so it benefits from an annual pruning in winter (January), to shape the tree and also to allow the remaining branches to become stronger.

Give this tree a dry, rocky location in full sun or part shade. It must be protected from deer. Because of its weak branches, it should also be protected from strong winds. It can be found at some native plant nurseries. It is also easily started from seed.