

Cascara (*Rhamnus purshiana*)

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Cascara is many things to many people. To some, it is a graceful understory tree. To others, cascara is a time-honored mild laxative. In recent year, it has become a recommended street tree because of its smaller size and beautiful leaves. And now, it has joined the list of Water-Wise plants for home landscapes. I have two small cascara in my garden and both are doing very well with minimal care.

Although the OSU Plant Identification website <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ldplants/rhapu.htm> lists this as growing to 50 feet tall, this will not typically occur in landscape situations where it tends to maintain a shorter stature. Cascara can grow either in a tree or shrub form, but I think the small tree form is more adaptable for most gardens. It does well in sun or shade. Although it is drought tolerant and does well in native forests, providing some irrigation does improve its appearance in the dry summer months.

In nature, cascara occurs from British Columbia to northern California, with limited distribution east of the Cascades. In Oregon, these tend to be in the Blue Mountain area or in the higher Cascades East of the crest. The leaves are up to 3-4 inches long and prominently veined with golden fall color. In late summer, small flowers are replaced by small purple-black fruit, which remind me of cherries. For more information and pictures, visit the OSU site listed above. To explore its medicinal and other attributes, visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhamnus_purshiana.

