Driving around the Mohave County area you can’t help but notice and immediately identify a Mesquite tree. It is probably one of the most popular landscape trees next to the Palo Verde. It is basically a carefree tree, which does not require a great deal of water after the first year. However, to keep this tree beautiful in our landscape, maintenance is required. First, let’s touch on a little history of this magnificent tree.

The wood of the mesquite is considered harder than oak. The Indians used it for framing their huts and the early settlers as fence posts, wagon wheels and walkways. It is currently being used as flooring in weight rooms since it can withstand the weight athlete’s drop on it. The wood also is an excellent fuel source for heating and cooking since it burns hot and is somewhat smokeless. As you well know, mesquite flavoring is popular in barbecuing. Since the bark of the mesquite strips easily and is smooth it was used for making baskets, fabric and shoes and the sap was used as glue. The thorns were utilized as sewing needles and for tattooing. Don’t forget the leaves which when boiled as a tea was used as an eyewash, and to relieve headache and stomachaches. The seedpods are one of the most popular parts of the tree. It is nutritious and can be harvested in September and October. Once sun dried or oven dried, they can be ground in a coffee grinder or food processor. Then add the ground pods (about the consistency of cornmeal) for flavoring in bread, biscuits or tortillas. And
don’t forget; use it as a rub on your meat while you barbecue it over hot mesquite coals.

Now let’s get down to the health and care of the mesquite tree. The first year of planting a mesquite tree is when it will require water; after that, turn off the bubbler if there is one next to it. Why? When the mesquite has a continual supply of water, the branches and leaves grow and grow. But underground the roots are not extending out which is why in our severe windstorms you see so many mesquite uprooted. When you water a desert plant properly, it sends its roots down and out as far as the water goes. That is why you need to deep water your mesquites. How often you ask? Since our mesquites are used as a “landscape tree”, we want them to look green and full. Therefore, good rule of thumb in the summer time is to water deeply once a month (now if we are running 120+ on a consistent basis you might need to increase to twice a month) and in the winter, probably not at all. But once again, if we have a dry winter with no rain and a lot of wind, a good deep watering every 6 to 8 weeks might be necessary.

Pruning your mesquite tree, as in any of our native plants, should be kept at a minimum. Selective pruning should be done while the tree is young. Once it has reached a desired size, its growth will slow due to the reduced irrigation. At that time, thin branches within the tree if necessary. Do not top and chop the tree back. First, you are opening the tree up to disease due to open wounds. Secondly, you will be stimulating the tree to grow faster in order to heal itself. The new shoots and branches that it will produce will never become as strong as the main branches that you have removed, which could be detrimental in a windstorm. And thirdly, the natural beauty of this tree will be impaired.

When planting this tree, remember that it can grow to 45 feet wide. It is best used as an accent tree and should not be planted near a house or your septic system. Its roots can become quite evasive. And since it has a tendency to litter it is not recommended for planting around pool areas.

Hopefully you have gained some increased knowledge of this beautiful native plant. When looking at it, try and imagine our forefathers sitting under this tree
keeping cool on a hot summer day or one of our Native Americans picking seed pods to be ground into medicine or food.

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