

Curl-leaf Cercocarpus or Curl-leaf Mountain-mahogany



A shrub or small tree of northwestern and west-central Colorado, usually 3 to 25 feet (1 to 8 m) tall. It grows in the pinon-juniper woodlands, and on mountain slopes among Ponderosa pine, Douglas-Fir, Lodgepole pine, and the spruce-fir forests at 6500 – 9000 feet (2000 – 2750 m) elevation). The trunk and branches are often crooked. The curled leaf edges and silky curled tails on the fruit are distinctive. The leaves are evergreen. Deer browse on the leaves and shelter in thickets of mountain-mahogany. The curly tails on the seeds straighten out in dry weather, and curl again in moist conditions. This flexing helps drive loose seeds into the soil. The scientific name *Cercocarpus ledifolius* comes from the Greek *cerkos carpos*, “tail fruit.” A common name is mountain-mahogany, though this plant is not related to the tropical mahogany tree; the name is due to the dark wood. The dark heartwood is said to be so heavy that it sinks.

Identification: evergreen leaves: ½ to 1 inches (1 to 3 cm) long; 1/3 to 2/3 (5 to 10 mm) inches wide, dark green, shiny, and leathery. The *untoothed edges curl under*, but the leaf undersides are mostly exposed.

Stems: and twigs reddish. Bark: hard, flaky, up to one inch (2 cm) thick.

Fruit: feathery, silver-colored, tails are 2 to 3 inches (2.5 to 7.5 cm) long.

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