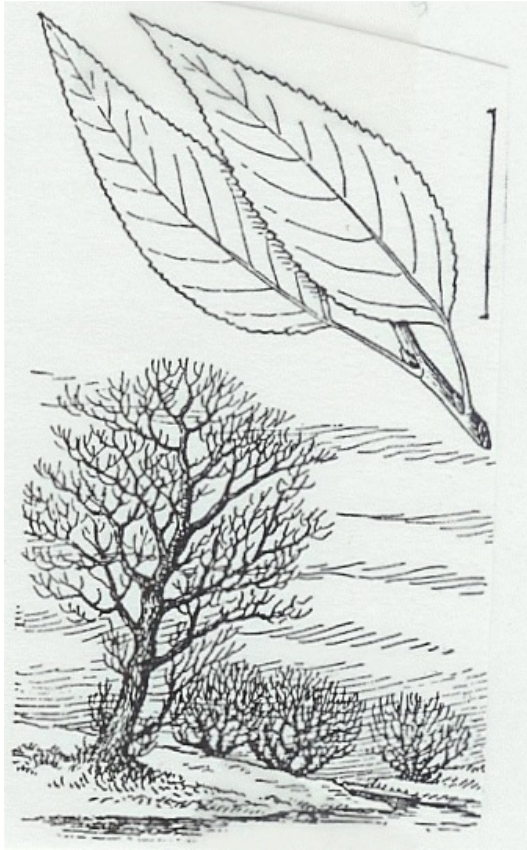


Peachleaf and Pacific Willows



Our present camp is a beautiful one. A rich and open plain of luxuriant grass, dotted with buffalo in all directions, a high picturesque hill in front, and a lovely stream of cold mountain water flowing at our feet. On the borders of this stream, as usual, is a dense belt of willows, and under the shade of these we sit and work by day, and sleep soundly at night.

- John Kirk Townsend, 1834.

Peachleaf willow is the largest of many kinds of willows of the western prairies, and it is often the only large native tree on the prairies other than the cottonwood. The Peachleaf willow is also found, with cottonwoods, along streams of the eastern foothills of the Rockies, in river valley bottoms of the western slopes, and in the Rio Grande valley, but not above 7500 feet (2300 m) elevation.

Like many other tree-sized willows, this tree often has multiple sloping main stems, reaching 15 feet (4.5 m) or more in height. Some specimens have single upright trunks and reach 30 to 45 feet (9 to 14 m) with trunks up to two feet (1.8 m) in diameter. It grows rapidly but is short lived, and the soft weak wood has no use as timber. Peachleaf willow only spreads by seeds, which puts it at a disadvantage to foreign willow trees that can propagate from roots or from even bits of live twigs that have snapped off and fallen into streams and been carried away to moist soil.

Identifying the Peachleaf willow:

Leaves of Peachleaf willow are dull yellow-green above, two to six inches long, 3/4 to 1 1/4 inches (20 to 32 mm) wide, drawn out into a long point, finely toothed on edge of leaf, with stout orange or yellow mid-rib and prominent veins. Underside a dull whitish color. Leaves of young shoots much larger. Leafstalks twisted and 1/3 to 3/4 inch (8 to 20 mm) long.

The Stems and twigs are yellowish, orange, reddish, to pale gray. There are no terminal buds on the ends of willow twigs, an obvious feature that distinguishes willows from cottonwood trees. Likewise the buds of all willows have only one scale, the only tree group of the southern Rockies with one bud scale.

Peachleaf willow bark is smooth when young; pale gray or reddish brown to very dark brown or dark gray and deeply furrowed and cracked into ridges or thin loose plates on older trees.

The scientific name of Peachleaf willow is “*Salix amygdaloides* Andersson,” from amygdalus the Latin name for peach.

The **Pacific willow** (*Salix lucida* Mühlenberg subsp. *lasiandra* (Bentham) E. Murray) is similar to the Peachleaf willow. Its leaves may be darker green in color and shiny. It is found in Archuleta, San Miguel, and Montrose Counties in Colorado.

The Peachleaf and Pacific willows are the only large native willows of Colorado. Other native willows of the Rockies occasionally achieve small tree size, such as the Bebb willow and the Scouler willow. These are described separately. It may be difficult to distinguish the smaller willows from one another, especially the many kinds of willows which never attain tree size.

The **Crack willow** is a common willow of Colorado cities, along streams. It can grow quite large, with trunks over 5 feet through and heights over 60 feet. Crack willow has dark brown bark in rough furrows. The smooth bright green leaves often reach 6 inches in length. The Crack willow is not native to the west; it is common on the east coast. Its twigs break easily in the wind, and new trees can sprout from twigs buried in wet soil, making this tree a very prolific spreader.

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