



ARIZONA-SONORA DESERT MUSEUM

PLANT CARE INFORMATION

Elephant Tree, or Torote Blanco

Bursera microphylla

DESCRIPTION: Old World relatives of elephant trees are the sources of frankincense and myrrh. Some of the New World species, including this one, are also highly aromatic and are used as incense. *Bursera microphylla* is a small shrub in the mountains of central to southern Arizona, becoming a large tree in southern Sonora, Mexico. It is also a dominant small tree in parts of Baja California. Growth rate and ultimate size are both controlled primarily by container size. When a plant has lots of root room, it grows very fast, producing two to three feet of new growth per season. When potbound, growth slows almost to a standstill, though the trunk will continue to thicken with age. It is in leaf primarily during the summer growing season, though some foliage may persist year round. Stem growth is limited to the humid summer monsoon season.

CULTURE



Hardiness: Frost tender; protect plants when temperatures dip below freezing. It can be stored in a dark place such as a garage for a couple of months in winter. Against a wall under a carport or patio is sufficient for light frosts; for temperatures below 25°F, bring into an enclosed space.



Sun tolerance: Full sun or very light shade during the growing season. Growth will be spindly in shadier sites.



Watering and feeding: Moderate during summer growing season; water when soil is just barely moist. Reduce watering to about once a month during winter. Fertilize lightly every month during the growing season.



Soil requirements: Well-drained. Repot only in summer.



Pruning: Prune to shape. This is especially important if you want to maintain a bonsai form. As soon as new branches are a few inches long, pinch back to a few leaves. If you prefer, prune to longer sprouts to get a larger plant.