

TOOTHACHE TREE

Zanthoxylum clava-herculis

ALSO KNOWN AS: HERCULES CLUB, PEPPERBARK, TICKLE TONGUE, SOUTHERN PRICKLY ASH



SITE CONDITIONS:

full sun to partial shade, sandy and loam (silt) soils, dry to moist soils, good drainage

BLOOM SEASON:

Spring

PLANT HEIGHT:

2 - 4'

GEORGIA DISTRIBUTION:

Coast

Toothache Tree is a native deciduous tree or shrub found in dry, sandy soils of coastal plains, dunes, riverbanks, and maritime forests. It grows spiny branches and compound leaves that contain aromatic citrus oils. In spring, it produces fragrant, greenish-yellow flowers, followed by dark seeds that disperse by wind. The bark is gray and corky with wart-like spines.

Also called "Hercules' club" or "tickle tongue," this plant has long been used by Indigenous and African American communities to treat oral pain. When the bark or leaves are chewed, they release oils that create a tingling, numbing effect.

Fun fact:

Native Americans found that the tree's bark and leaves contain a natural anesthetic and began using it to numb toothache pain. By placing a small single thorn on their gum, the pain would be gone within minutes, at which point they could remove the tooth in a painless manner.