Who is Eric Conn?

Eric Conn is a professor emeritus of biochemistry at UC Davis and a longtime supporter of the Arboretum. He served as President of the Friends of the UC Davis Arboretum from 1980-84 and 1990-1992. The Acacia Grove was dedicated to Dr. Conn on the occasion of his retirement in 1992 after 40 years with the University. Dr. Conn continues to support the Arboretum and the Acacia Grove through an endowment he established with his late wife, Louise. Income from the endowment helps us improve the acacia collection and test different species for use in Central Valley gardens.

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You decide. Many acacias are well adapted to our climate.

to grow...
• Acacias have interesting foliage, soft clouds of yellow flowers, and a pleasant fragrance
• Most acacias are heat and drought tolerant
• Acacias rarely have pest or disease problems
• Many acacias are small to medium-sized shrubs or trees
• Acacias can be quite hardy; some have been growing here since 1964

or not to grow...
• Some acacia species are frost tender and won’t survive our worst freezes
• Some species have wicked thorns; Australian species are usually spineless
• Some acacias have weak wood that is prone to breaking

Explore the Eric E. Conn Acacia Grove to see the approximately 50 species of acacias in the Arboretum’s collection—just a small fraction of the world’s 1,300 species.
Have You Ever…
eaten an acacia?

Gum arabic made from acacia is used by the food industry as a stabilizer. It makes candy chewy and is found in many common food products. Gum arabic is very important economically as a major export of several African nations.

The tree that you see in front of you and that is pictured to the right, *Acacia caffra*, produces gum arabic. Most commercially-harvested gum arabic, however, is from other African species, *Acacia senegal* and *Acacia seyal*. These are known as the gum acacias. They are not able to grow in the UC Davis Arboretum because it is too cold during the Central Valley winters for them to survive here.
Have You Ever…
sat on an acacia?

Blackwood acacia is prized by furniture makers because of its rich brown color and luster. It is also a very hard wood, making it quite durable. Downed urban trees are a sustainable and local source of blackwood acacia.

Recycled wood from urban blackwood acacias was used to make the benches in the Acacia Grove, like the one behind you.

Pale yellow to white flowers grace this tree in February and March.

Eric E. Conn Acacia Grove
arboretum.ucdavis.edu
**Have you ever… worn an acacia?**

An extract from the flowers of the sweet acacia is used to make perfume. Perfume makers use acacia oil to soften and tie the different notes of the perfume together.

Visit the Eric E. Conn Acacia Grove in February and March to experience clouds of perfume in the garden.

Flowering branches of the sweet acacia, *Acacia farnesiana*, are collected in spring, and the aromatic oils are carefully extracted to make perfume.
Acacias have many ways to defend themselves against hungry animals.

Look at the thorns on the sweet thorn acacia (*Acacia karoo*) in front of you. Would you try to eat this plant?

**BITING INSECTS**
Biting ants live in the swollen thorns of some species (like *Acacia caven*). They attack other insects and animals that try to feed on their home plant. These biting ants do not occur here!

**POISON**
Many acacia species produce poisonous cyanide compounds that are activated when the plant is eaten. UC Davis scientist Dr. Eric Conn researched the chemistry of this process for many years.

**SPINES**
Spines keep large, hungry animals away. Spines are common on African and American acacia species. Australian acacias are usually spineless.

**TOXIC SAP**
The sap of many acacias contains poisonous toxins and sticky resins that taste bad.