



Bauhinia blakeana Hong Kong Orchid-Tree¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

Growing 20 to 40 feet in height, Hong Kong Orchid-Tree creates a rounded, spreading canopy composed of large, six to eight-inch-diameter, gray/green leaves (Fig. 1). Since young trees can be irregularly shaped, pruning during the first several years after propagation is often needed to develop a more uniform crown. It is the beautiful display of orchid-like blooms, though, which make Hong Kong Orchid-Tree so desirable for the landscape, the large, six-inch blossoms appearing in multiple shades of purple, rose, and pink during the summer, fall and early winter months, when little color is usually present in the garden. These flowers are sterile and will not set seed so the plant will not drop long pods as other Orchid-Trees do, and they will not become a pest in the landscape. This is often the Orchid-Tree of choice for planting in urban landscapes.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Bauhinia blakeana*

Pronunciation: bah-HIN-ee-uh blay-kee-AY-nuh

Common name(s): Hong Kong Orchid-Tree

Family: *Leguminosae*

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; shade tree; small parking

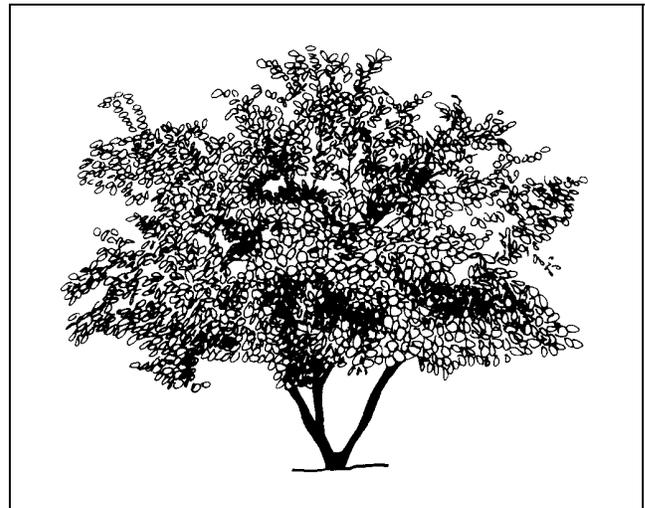


Figure 1. Middle-aged Hong Kong Orchid-Tree.

lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 20 to 40 feet

Spread: 20 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: vase shape

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: lobed; cleft

Leaf shape: orbiculate

Leaf venation: palmate

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen;
evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: purple; red

Flower characteristics: very showy; winter
flowering

Fruit

There is no fruit on this tree.

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: medium; thin

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

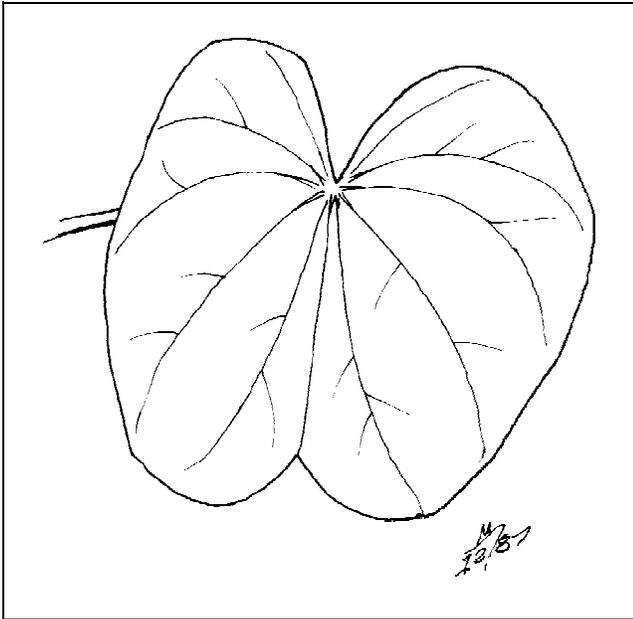


Figure 3. Foliage of Hong Kong Orchid-Tree.

Pests

Borers, caterpillars, mites.

Diseases

Leaf spot, leaf scorch diseases.

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Some people object to the debris which always seems to be falling from other Orchid-Trees, but this one produces no fruit. It makes a beautiful specimen planted in parks or on large properties. They are well suited for planting along streets and in wide medians along a boulevard.

Hong Kong Orchid-Tree grows in full sun on well-drained soil. Trees are very drought-tolerant and actually flower best on dry soils. Problems include a tendency to show nutritional deficiencies, especially potassium; the weak wood which is susceptible to breakage in storms; and the litter problem created by the falling leaves and flowers. Orchid-Tree may need occasional pruning to maintain its shape.

Propagation is by cuttings or air-layering.