



Bauhinia spp. Orchid-Tree¹

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INTRODUCTION

This deciduous to semi-evergreen tree has a vase-shaped, open canopy with lower branches removed made up of large, bilobed, light green, papery leaves (Fig. 1). Unpruned trees form a rounded crown. The orchid-like blooms, in shades of purple, red, pink, white, or yellow, are three to four inches across and produced in abundance at various times of the year, depending upon species. Orchid tree makes a spectacular specimen or shade tree or fits well into mixed shrubbery borders.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Bauhinia* spp.

Pronunciation: bah-HIN-ee-uh species

Common name(s): 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 lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; residential street tree

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

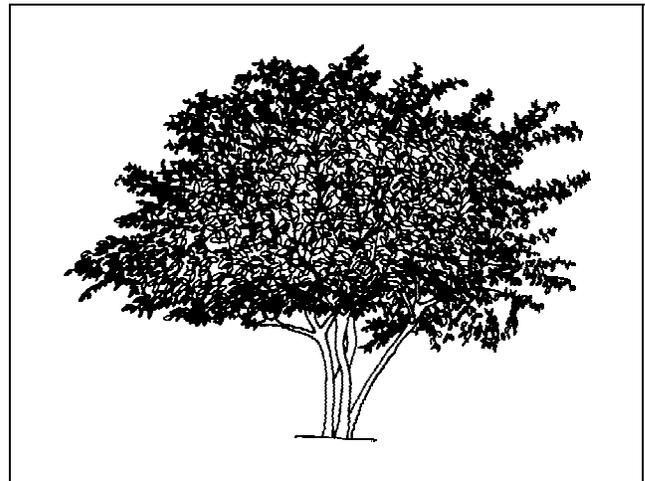


Figure 1. Middle-aged Orchid-Tree.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 25 to 30 feet

Spread: 25 to 35 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: round; vase shape

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: lobed; cleft

Leaf shape: orbiculate

Leaf venation: palmate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous; evergreen; semievergreen

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: pink; purple; red; white; yellow

Flower characteristics: very showy; year round flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated; pod

Fruit length: 6 to 12 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; persistent on the tree; showy

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

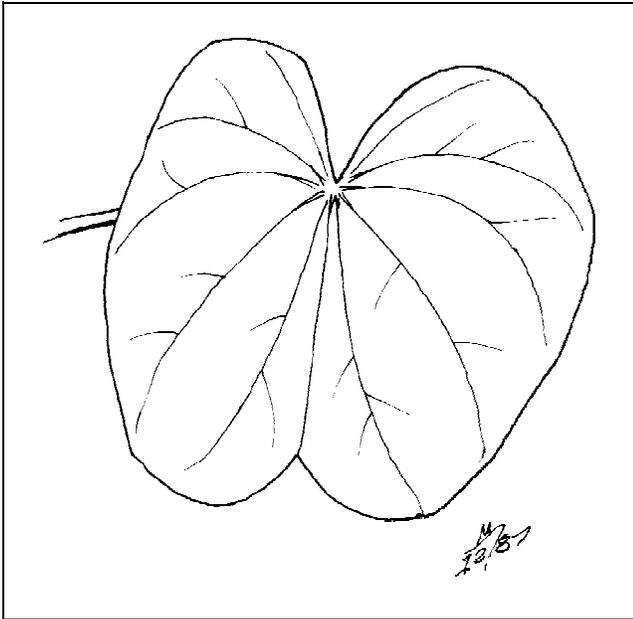


Figure 3. Foliage of Orchid-Tree.

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: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: No entries found.

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Growing best in full sun or high, shifting pine shade, orchid tree thrives in any well-drained soil but in alkaline soils will show interveinal chlorosis (yellowing) on the leaves. The flowers are followed by many brown, woody, 12-inch-long seed pods which are unattractive on the tree and a nuisance when they drop. The wood tends to be weak and sprouts are often seen growing from the base of the tree creating an unkempt appearance. Some people consider the fallen leaves messy because they are large and decompose slowly.

In flower, orchid tree makes a beautiful street tree affect with foliage and flowers arching over the road. However, the drooping branches must be removed as they develop, to allow for vehicle clearance beneath. Because sprouts will have to be removed regularly and the tree is bare for a month or two, this is considered by many to be a high-maintenance tree not suited for

large-scale street tree planting. But it is a tough tree growing in most soils with pH below 7.5.

Many species, cultivars, and varieties are available. *Bauhinia blakeana*, the Hong Kong Orchid-Tree, is seedless and would not present such a litter problem. It is also the most spectacular and most wanted *Bauhinia* spp., bearing six-inch, orchid-like flowers of rich reddish or rose purple during the winter but is very tender to freezing temperatures. *Bauhinia variegata*, most popular, produces in winter and spring most nearly orchid-like blossoms of purplish casts or pure white in cultivar 'Candida'. *Bauhinia purpurea*, most variable, produces narrow-petaled, red-purple to blue-purple flowers in late fall and early winter while leaves are on the trees. *Bauhinia monandra* produces pink, single-stamened flowers all summer. *Bauhinia acuminata* also blooms all summer but with white flowers. *Bauhinia aculeata*, with white flowers, is hardy as far north as hardiness USDA hardiness zone 8b but has a tendency to produce many root suckers.

Propagation is by seeds, or cuttings for the rare types.

Pests

Chewing insects and borers may present a problem for Orchid-Tree.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern. Interveinal chlorosis occurs on high pH soil from micronutrient deficiency.