



Robinia pseudoacacia 'Purple Robe' 'Purple Robe' Black Locust¹

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INTRODUCTION

This cultivar of Black Locust probably grows to about 40 feet tall with a spread of 20 to 35 feet (Fig. 1). The upright, rounded growth and short, irregular branches form a tighter canopy than the species and cast medium shade below the tree, allowing a lawn to grow. The 6 to 14-inch-long, dull, blue/green leaves, made up of multiple leaflets, are some of the last to appear in spring and often drop early in the autumn, just barely fading to a sickly yellow/green before dropping. For approximately a 10-day period in late spring, the trees are festooned with four to eight-inch-long, dense clusters of extremely fragrant, one-inch rose to pink blossoms (similar to sweet-peas) which are literally "alive" with the bustling activity of visiting bees. The honey which is produced from the species is quite delicious and sought-after. The two to four-inch-long, dark red to black, leathery seeds pods which follow will persist on the trees throughout the winter.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Purple Robe'

Pronunciation: roe-BIN-nee-uh
soo-doe-uh-KAY-shuh

Common name(s): 'Purple Robe' Black Locust,
'Purple Robe' Common Locust

Family: *Leguminosae*

USDA hardiness zones: 4 through 8 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: reclamation plant; shade tree; no proven urban tolerance

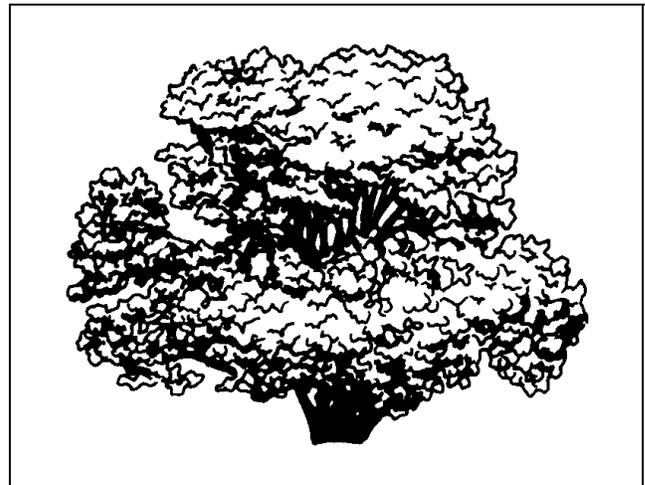


Figure 1. Middle-aged 'Purple Robe' Black Locust.

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION

Height: 30 to 50 feet

Spread: 20 to 35 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: oval; upright

Crown density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: odd pinnately compound

Leaflet margin: entire

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-572, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.
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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaflet shape: elliptic (oval); oblong; obovate

Leaflet venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaflet blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: blue or blue-green; green

Fall color: yellow

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: lavender

Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; spring flowering; very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: pod

Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches; 1 to 3 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: black; red

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; persistent on the tree

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; thorns are present on the trunk or branches

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: thin

Wood specific gravity: 0.69

Culture

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

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

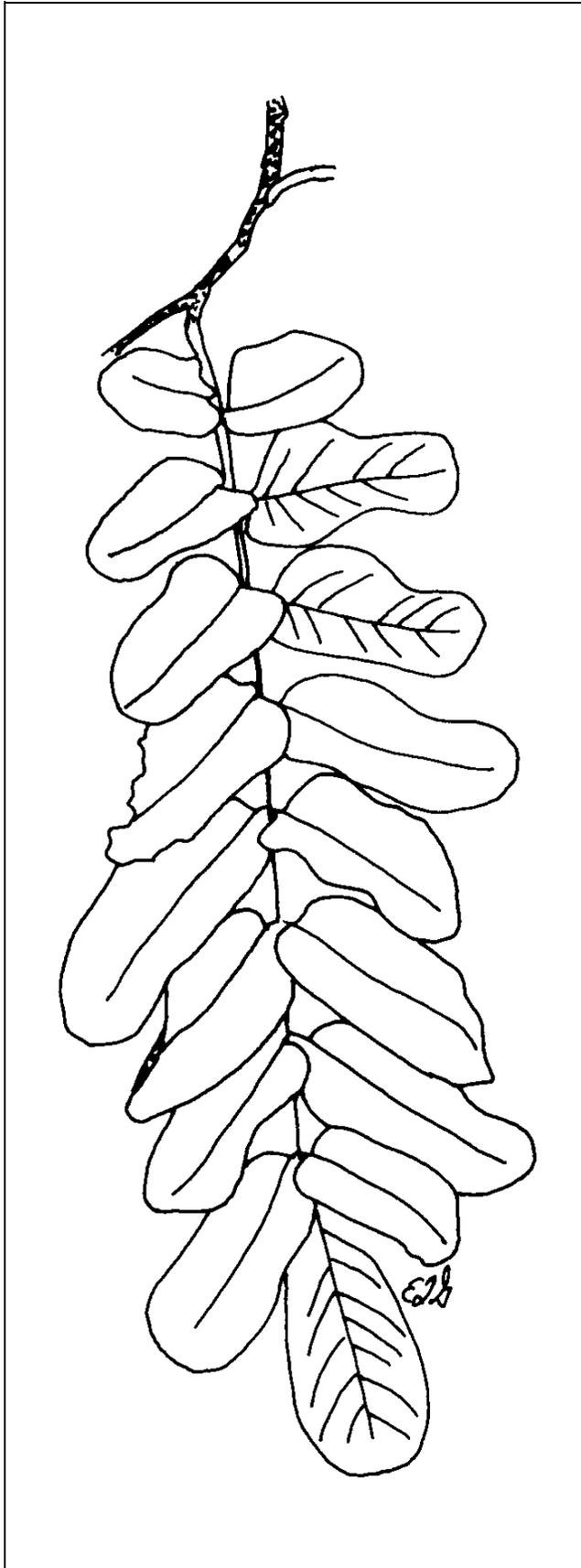


Figure 3. Foliage of 'Purple Robe' Black Locust.

Roots: surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere with mowing

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: seeds itself into the landscape

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

USE AND MANAGEMENT

These seeds are widely dispersed by birds and other wildlife, and along with the root suckering, invasive root system, Black Locust can spread into surrounding landscapes. This feature, along with the thorns found along the branches, should be considered when placing Black Locust in the ornamental garden. It is probably best saved for the reclamation project or roadside planting where trees receive no maintenance. If left to its own devices, Black Locust will form dense thickets, even on the poorest soils, a fact which makes it quite useful in reclamation applications.

Although the wood of Black Locust is reputed to be extremely strong and durable (pioneers used it to fashion nails for building ships and houses), the branches of the species are brittle and subject to damage in high winds. This may be due largely to the tendency for the branches to form a narrow angle with the trunk and to grow aggressively relative to the trunk forming embedded bark. This can be partially corrected by pruning the major branches so they grow to no more than about half the size of the trunk. This will probably not be as much a problem on this cultivar as it is on the species.

Able to tolerate drought, salt, and poor soil, Black Locust will grow in full sun or partial shade on almost any soil acid or alkaline except that which is permanently wet. A tough tree which should be saved for the toughest sites. Not for general use in urban areas due to borer problems unless located in a moist, well-drained site with plenty of soil space.

Other cultivars include: 'Erecta', upright form; 'Frisia' - yellowish leaves in early summer.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Pests

Locust borer is a serious pest although borer-resistant clones are now being developed. Also bothered by carpenterworm, locust leaf miner, and scales. Leaf miner is a universal problem on the species. Trees along the highways in the south can be seen in summer riddled with damage from this pest.

Diseases

This tree is susceptible to canker, leaf spot, and powdery mildew.