



Chorisia speciosa Floss-Silk Tree¹

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INTRODUCTION

This rounded, deciduous tree eventually has wide-spreading branches which are green when young and covered with spines, often becoming grey and sometimes losing their coarse, sharp spines (Fig. 1). Young trees can have a columnar or upright form. The spiny trunk is unusually thick and remains green even on older trees. Floss-Silk tree can reach 50 feet in height with an equal or greater spread, and grows rapidly the first few years, then more slowly. Some trees maintain a relatively narrow crown with one straight trunk while others are wide-spreading, particularly on older specimens. The large, showy, pink and white, five-petaled flowers, which somewhat resemble narrow-petaled hibiscus, are produced in small clusters in fall and winter (usually October) when the tree is nearly bare. The fruits are large, eight-inch-long, pear-shaped, woody capsules, filled with silky, white, kapok-like floss and pea-like seeds. Floss from the seeds was used for stuffing pillows and thin strips of the bark have been used to make rope.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Chorisia speciosa*

Pronunciation: koe-RIZZ-ee-uh spee-see-OH-suh

Common name(s): Floss-Silk Tree

Family: *Bombacaceae*

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

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; shade tree; specimen; residential street tree

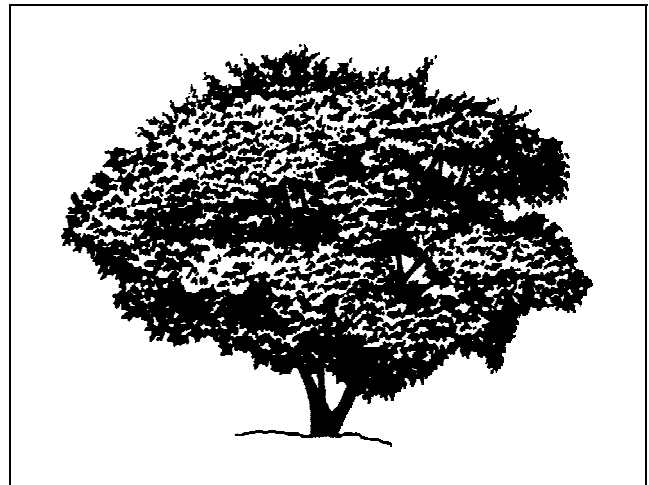


Figure 1. Mature Floss-Silk Tree.

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 35 to 50 feet

Spread: 40 to 55 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: round; pyramidal; upright

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: palmately compound

Leaflet margin: serrate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaflet shape: elliptic (oval)
Leaflet venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaflet blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: pink; white
Flower characteristics: fall flowering; very showy; winter flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval; round
Fruit length: 6 to 12 inches
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown; white
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; grow mostly upright and will not droop; should be grown with a single leader; thorns are present on the trunk or branches; very showy trunk

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in full sun

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Other

Roots: surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere with mowing

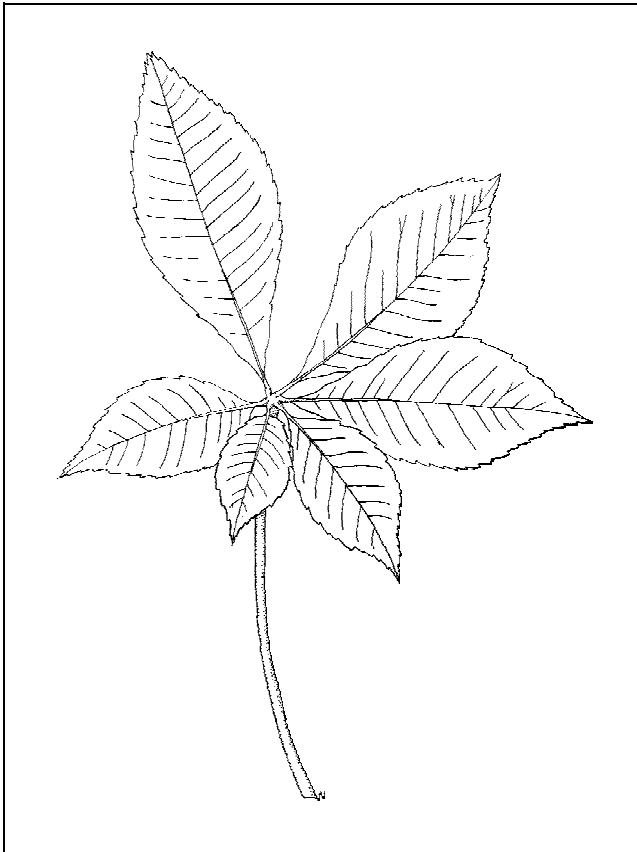


Figure 3. Foliage of Floss-Silk Tree.

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

An excellent specimen tree for parks, parking lots, and other large landscapes, Floss-Silk tree is spectacular when in bloom, producing an outstanding show of color in the fall. Large roots often form at the base of the trunk just beneath the soil, so be careful not to plant the tree too close to sidewalks or pavement. Fifteen feet from curbs, driveways and sidewalks should be adequate.

Prune the tree to be sure that only one central trunk develops when the tree is young. The central leader becomes less vigorous in middle age, allowing lateral limbs to develop into the main structure of the tree producing a spreading form. Although most branches are horizontal and well-attached to the tree,

upright branches can develop with embedded bark which can cause a branch to split from the trunk. Prevent this by pruning the major limbs so they remain less than half the diameter of the trunk.

Flowering best in full sun, Floss-Silk tree will thrive on any reasonably fertile soil with good drainage. It is not salt tolerant but does tolerate high pH. Grafted trees are preferred as they bloom earlier and at a smaller size.

Two grafted selections are available: 'Majestic Beauty' has rich pink flowers and 'Los Angeles Beautiful' has wine red flowers. The cultivar 'Monza' has a thornless trunk and pink fall flowers.

Propagation is by seed or grafting.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.