INTRODUCTION

This slow growing, open-crown, round, small tree eventually reaches to 12 to 15 feet tall (occasionally 20) and 10 to 12 feet wide (Fig. 1). The large panicles of wispy dark pink flowers produced in spring and early summer give the effect of a cloud of smoke. Leaves emerge purple and fade to dark green in the summer. They make a wonderful accent in a shrub border and can be planted as a specimen or as a patio tree where the black, showy, multiple trunk can be displayed. Planting Smoketree is a good way to extend the spring flowering-tree season into the summer before the Crape-Myrtles come into full bloom. Fall color is usually good to excellent and ranges from yellow to orange and brilliant red-purple. Many people grow it simply to enjoy the vivid fall color.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Cotinus coggygria ‘Purpureus’
Pronunciation: koe-TYE-nus koe-GUY-gree-uh
Common name(s): ‘Purpureus’ Smoketree, ‘Purpureus’ Wig-Tree, ‘Purpureus’ Smokebush
Family: Anacardiaceae
USDA hardness zones: 5 through 8 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; 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

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

DESCRIPTION

Height: 12 to 15 feet
Spread: 10 to 15 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: round
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: slow
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); obovate
Leaf venation: pinnate; reticulate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: red
Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: pink; purple
Flower characteristics: spring flowering; summer flowering; very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: irregular; oval
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
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; 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; showy trunk; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown
Current year twig thickness: medium; thick
Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

The tree is tough and adapts to restricted soil spaces. It could be used along a street under power lines and would not require pruning for many years. It is a small tree, well-adapted to urban areas with almost year-round interest which should be used more in our landscapes.

Smoketree grows best in a sunny location and a well-drained loam. It will grow asymmetrically and lean toward the light in a partially sunny area, so it is best to locate it in full day sun where the crown will develop symmetrically. Though sometimes short-lived in rich soil, Smoketree is useful in dry, rocky soil where there is no irrigation. It also grows in a wide range of soil pH, including alkaline. Probably short-lived (20 years - maybe more) in most situations but who cares - the tree is great while it’s around!

Propagation of cultivars is by cuttings.

Cultivars include: ‘Daydream’ - heavy production of panicles, dense habit of growth; ‘Flame’ - brilliant orange-red fall color, pink inflorescences; ‘Nordine’ - resembles ‘Royal Purple’; ‘Notcutt’s Variety’ - dark maroon-purple leaves (also known as ‘Foliis Purpureis Notcutt’s Variety’ and ‘Rubrifolius’); ‘Royal Purple’ - leaves are darker purple than ‘Notcutt’s Variety’, rich red-purple fall color, purplish-red inflorescences; ‘Pendulus’ - pendulous branches; and ‘Velvet Cloak’ - dark purple-leaf form, spectacular fall color of reddish-purple.

Pests

Oblique-banded leaf roller mines and rolls the leaves, usually in June. The insect rarely occurs in sufficient numbers to warrant control. When it does occur they can be picked off by hand or sprayed with Bacillus thuringiensis.

Diseases

Leaf spots can be caused by various genera of fungi but are usually not serious.

Scab may cause leaf drop. No controls are listed.

The most serious disease is Verticillium wilt. Smoketree is very susceptible, and entire branches wilt and die. Prune out infected branches, fertilize, and water the plant during dry weather.

A stem canker can be a problem in the eastern U.S.