**Cotinus coggygria** ‘Royal Purple’  
‘Royal Purple’ Smoketree^1^  

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson^2^  

**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 purple-colored flowers produced in spring and early summer give the effect of a cloud of smoke. 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. This cultivar has deep purple leaves which keep their color all summer long. Fall color is usually a rich red-purple. Many people grow it simply to enjoy the spectacular fall color.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scientific name:** Cotinus coggygria ‘Royal Purple’  
**Pronunciation:** koe-TYE-nus koe-GUY-gree-uh  
**Common name(s):** ‘Royal Purple’ Smoketree, ‘Royal Purple’ Wig-Tree, ‘Royal Purple’ Smokebush  
**Family:** Anacardiaceae  
**USDA hardiness zones:** 5B 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 plant; screen; trainable as a standard; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; residential street tree  
**Availability:** grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries  

**DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 12 to 15 feet  
**Spread:** 10 to 18 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

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**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: purple or red  
Fall color: purple; red  
Fall characteristic: showy

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; showy

**Flower**

Flower color: purple; red  
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

**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’); ‘Purpureus’ - leaves bronze-green, inflorescences purplish-pink; ‘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.