**Laburnum spp.**
Goldenchain Tree

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

### INTRODUCTION

This is an airy, graceful, deciduous tall shrub or small tree, growing to a maximum of 20 to 25 feet, with rich, yellow wisteria-like, drooping flower panicles, up to 10 inches long, which appear in late spring or early summer (Fig. 1). The tree is truly incredible in full bloom. It is difficult to grow but if tried should be grown in a spot protected from full day sun, with very well-drained, alkaline pH soil and high organic matter. It tolerates alkaline soil but not wet soil, and does not grow well in soil below pH 7.0.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

- **Scientific name:** *Laburnum spp.*
- **Pronunciation:** luh-BER-num species
- **Common name(s):** Goldenchain Tree
- **Family:** Leguminosae
- **USDA hardness zones:** 5B through 7 (Fig. 2)
- **Origin:** not native to North America
- **Uses:** container or above-ground planter; espalier; near a deck or patio; specimen
- **Availability:** grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

### DESCRIPTION

- **Height:** 20 to 25 feet
- **Spread:** 12 to 18 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** irregular outline or silhouette
- **Crown shape:** upright
- **Crown density:** open
- **Growth rate:** medium

### Foliage

- **Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)
- **Leaf type:** odd pinnately compound; trifoliate
- **Leaflet margin:** entire
- **Leaflet shape:** elliptic (oval); obovate

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Leaflet venation: pinnate; reticulate  
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous  
Leaflet blade length: 2 to 4 inches; less than 2 inches  
Leaf color: green  
Fall color: no fall color change  
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow  
Flower characteristics: spring flowering; very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated; pod  
Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches  
Fruit covering: dry or hard  
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns  
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: loam; sand; alkaline; well-drained  
Drought tolerance: moderate  
Aerosol salt tolerance: none  
Soil salt tolerance: poor

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
Diseases

Leaf spot, laburnum vein mosaic and especially twig blight can be problems. Leaf-scald can also be a problem where bark is exposed to afternoon sun in winter. Root rot is also a problem in soil kept too moist.

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Goldenchain Tree is a good specimen, patio or border accent tree, and can also be espaliered against a wall. In USDA hardiness zone 7, young plants are extremely attractive but do not usually last long since the plant does not tolerate heat well. All parts of the plant are poisonous. Use as a novelty where a brightly-colored accent is needed in the spring. Do not overwater.

Laburnum alpinum is a related tree which is just as beautiful in flower.

Pests

Tree can be attacked by aphids or mealy-bugs.