Phellodendron amurense  
Amur Corktree¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

Growing 30 to 40 feet tall with an equal or much greater spread, Amur Corktree has a short trunk and an open, rounded, spreading canopy which makes it ideal as a durable shade tree (Fig. 1). Male clones can be used for street and parking lot planting because they produce no fruit. The deciduous, dark green, pinnately compound leaflets change to bronze and yellow in the fall before dropping. The insignificant yellow/green flowers appear in late May to early June on 2 to 3.5-inch-long panicles, and are followed by small black drupes which sometimes persist into winter, if not first devoured by birds. These black fruits give off a strong odor when crushed and create a mess on a sidewalk and some people may find it more desirable to only plant male trees (‘Macho’) which will not produce this fruit. The species can naturalize as seeds readily germinate in the landscape.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Phellodendron amurense  
Pronunciation: fell-oh-DEN-drawn am-moor-EN-see  
Common name(s): Amur Corktree, Chinese Corktree  
Family: Rutaceae  
USDA hardiness zones: 3B through 8 (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; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

DESCRIPTION

Height: 30 to 40 feet  
Spread: 40 to 60 feet  
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette  
Crown shape: round; spreading; vase shape  
Crown density: open  
Growth rate: medium  
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)  
Leaf type: odd pinnately compound  
Leaflet margin: entire; undulate

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-437, 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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**Leaflet shape:** elliptic (oval); ovate
**Leaflet venation:** pinnate; reticulate
**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous
**Leaflet blade length:** 2 to 4 inches
**Leaf color:** green
**Fall color:** copper; yellow
**Fall characteristic:** showy

**Flower**
**Flower color:** green; white
**Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

**Fruit**
**Fruit shape:** oval
**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch; < .5 inch
**Fruit covering:** fleshy
**Fruit color:** black; green
**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; persistent on the tree; showy

**Trunk and Branches**
**Trunk/bark/branches:** 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; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns
**Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure
**Breakage:** resistant
**Current year twig color:** brown; gray
**Current year twig thickness:** thick

**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:** moderate

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**Figure 2.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.
Figure 3. Foliage of Amur Corktree.

Other

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: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: No entries found.

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

The attractive grey/brown bark is deeply ridged and furrowed, and on mature trees it takes on a corky texture. Branches are usually borne low on the trunk, droop and grow horizontally forming a spreading habit. The shallow root system needs plenty of room to expand in order to establish the tree properly.

The fruitless (male) cultivar ‘Macho’ has thick, leathery leaves and a more pleasing, upright-spreading growth form. ‘Macho’ should be planted instead of the species due to its less spreading and less drooping habit which makes it more suited for street tree planting. Pruning usually is not required once good branch structure is established early in the life of the tree. Allow for adequate soil space for root development so they do not lift sidewalks and pavement. ‘Shademaster’ is also fruitless and available in the trade.

Amur Corktree grows rapidly and prefers to be grown in full sun on deep, rich soil but will tolerate any soil, acid or alkaline. It tolerates wet soil and drought. Once highly recommended as a street and urban-tolerant tree, it does not appear to hold up to the rigors of city life under certain conditions, particularly restricted soil spaces (although the experts appear to disagree as to the tolerance of this tree to city life - the tree may be more sensitive to soil conditions than is commonly realized).

Propagation is by seed, which germinate readily.

Pests and Diseases

This tree is virtually pest-free.