**Pterostyrax hispida**  
Fragrant Epaulette Tree

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

**INTRODUCTION**

Fragrant Epaulette Tree is a deciduous tree which can reach 20 to 30 feet in height with an equal spread but is more often seen smaller (Fig. 1). The three to eight-inch-long by four-inch-wide, light green, oval leaves have a silvery cast on their undersides, and the leaves turn yellow or yellow-green in fall before dropping. Of particular interest are the delicate, creamy white, slightly fragrant blooms which appear in early summer when few other trees are flowering. Hanging in nine-inch-long and four-inch-diameter clusters, these blossoms are quite striking when viewed from below so the tree should be properly situated to take advantage of this display, planting it on a bank along a walkway, in a raised bed, or above a bench. This will also allow the attractive bark to be more easily appreciated, an inner orange/tan color showing through the grey bark at expansion breaks. The seed pods which follow the pendulous blooms are grey, fuzzy, and cling to the branches throughout the winter. They are quite showy and useful in dried flower arrangements.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

| Scientific name: | Pterostyrax hispida |
| Pronunciation: | teer-oh-STY-racks HISS-pih-duh |
| Common name(s): | Fragrant Epaulette Tree, Wisteria-Tree |
| Family: | Styracaceae |
| USDA hardiness zones: | 5 through 8A (Fig. 2) |
| Origin: | not native to North America |
| Uses: | near a deck or patio; shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance |

**DESCRIPTION**

| Height: | 20 to 30 feet |
| Spread: | 20 to 30 feet |
| Crown uniformity: | irregular outline or silhouette |
| Crown shape: | spreading; vase shape |
| Crown density: | dense |
| Growth rate: | medium |

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: pectinate; serrate
Leaf shape: oblong; ovate
Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: yellow
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; showy; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; 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: gray
Current year twig thickness: medium; thin
Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**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

The wide-spreading, upright-spreading branches help to make this a fabulous small shade tree, casting deep shade beneath the tree. Some early pruning may be necessary to remove the lower branches (to allow easier access below the tree) or to control the tree’s shape. Seek out this little-known tree for a specimen or group planting which is not likely to be duplicated in the near future due to the rarity of the tree.

Fragrant Epaulette Tree should be grown in full sun on moist, well-drained soil. It will tolerate both acid and alkaline soils. The trees perform best when they receive no shade, becoming thin and flowering poorly in the shade.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.