Robinia pseudoacacia ‘Purple Robe’
‘Purple Robe’ Black Locust

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

This cultivar of Black Locust probably grows to about 40 feet tall with a spread of 20 to 35 feet (Fig. 1). The upright, rounded growth and short, irregular branches form a tighter canopy than the species and cast medium shade below the tree, allowing a lawn to grow. The 6 to 14-inch-long, dull, blue/green leaves, made up of multiple leaflets, are some of the last to appear in spring and often drop early in the autumn, just barely fading to a sickly yellow/green before dropping. For approximately a 10-day period in late spring, the trees are festooned with four to eight-inch-long, dense clusters of extremely fragrant, one-inch rose to pink blossoms (similar to sweet-peas) which are literally "alive" with the bustling activity of visiting bees. The honey which is produced from the species is quite delicious and sought-after. The two to four-inch-long, dark red to black, leathery seeds pods which follow will persist on the trees throughout the winter.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Robinia pseudoacacia ‘Purple Robe’

Pronunciation: roe-BIN-nee-uh

soo-doe-uh-KAY-shuh

Common name(s): ‘Purple Robe’ Black Locust,
‘Purple Robe’ Common Locust

Family: Leguminosae

USDA hardness zones: 4 through 8 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: reclamation plant; shade tree; no proven urban
tolerance

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

DESCRIPTION

Height: 30 to 50 feet

Spread: 20 to 35 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: oval; upright

Crown density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: odd pinnately compound

Leaflet margin: entire


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**Leaflet shape:** elliptic (oval); oblong; obovate
**Leaflet venation:** pinnate
**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous
**Leaflet blade length:** less than 2 inches
**Leaf color:** blue or blue-green; green
**Fall color:** yellow
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** lavender
**Flower characteristics:** pleasant fragrance; spring flowering; very showy

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** pod
**Fruit length:** 3 to 6 inches; 1 to 3 inches
**Fruit covering:** dry or hard
**Fruit color:** black; red
**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; persistent on the tree

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; thorns are present on the trunk or branches

**Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure

**Breakage:** susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break

**Current year twig color:** brown
**Current year twig thickness:** thin
**Wood specific gravity:** 0.69

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
**Drought tolerance:** high
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high
Other cultivars include: ‘Erecta’, upright form; ‘Frisia’ - yellowish leaves in early summer.

Propagation is by cuttings.
Pests

Locust borer is a serious pest although borer-resistant clones are now being developed. Also bothered by carpenterworm, locust leaf miner, and scales. Leaf miner is a universal problem on the species. Trees along the highways in the south can be seen in summer riddled with damage from this pest.

Diseases

This tree is susceptible to canker, leaf spot, and powdery mildew.