



Bauhinia purpurea Purple Orchid-Tree¹

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INTRODUCTION

The fast-growing Orchid-Tree will ultimately reach 35 feet in height and width, the slender trunks topped with arching branches clothed in large, two-lobed, deciduous leaves (Fig. 1). In fall, before the leaves drop, Orchid-Tree is festooned with many showy and delightfully fragrant, five-inch-wide blossoms, the narrow purple, pink, and lavender petals arranged to closely resemble an orchid. These flowers appear on the trees from September through November and are a beautiful sight to see, creating a vivid splash of color in the autumn landscape. The flowers are followed by 12-inch-long, slender, brown, flat seedpods which usually persist on the tree throughout the winter, then fall to create a mess to clean up. The spectacular flower display makes orchid-tree a favorite for specimen plantings.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Bauhinia purpurea*
Pronunciation: bah-HIN-ee-uh per-POOR-ee-uh
Common name(s): Purple Orchid-Tree
Family: *Leguminosae*
USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: 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; shade tree; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree

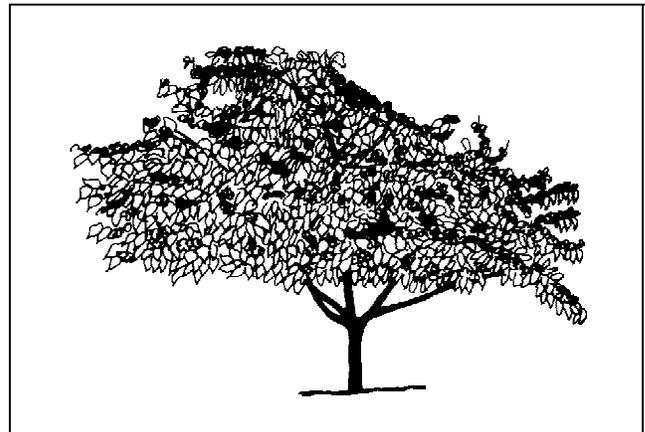


Figure 1. Middle-aged Purple Orchid-Tree.

lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; residential street tree
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION

Height: 30 to 35 feet
Spread: 30 to 35 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: round; vase shape
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: lobed; cleft

Leaf shape: orbiculate

Leaf venation: palmate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: blue; purple; red

Flower characteristics: fall flowering; very showy; winter flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated; pod

Fruit length: 6 to 12 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; 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; not particularly showy; 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: 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: medium; thin

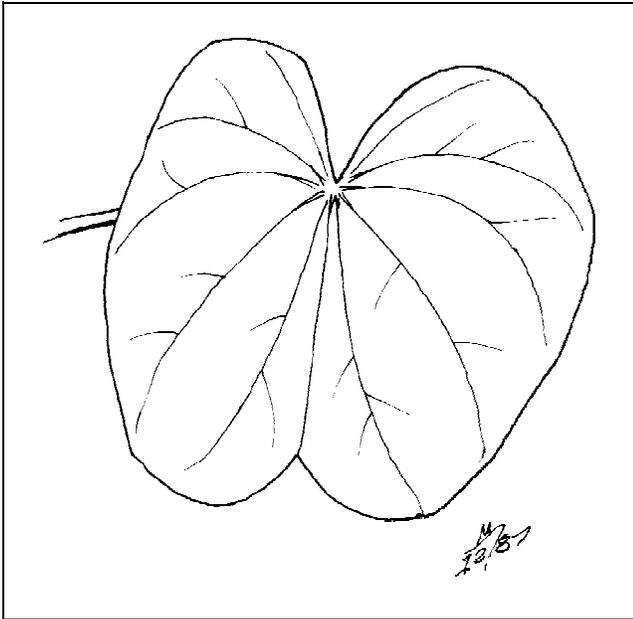


Figure 3. Foliage of Purple Orchid-Tree.

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun;
tree grows in full sun

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt 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: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: No entries found.

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the
tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Orchid-Tree should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil. Trees are very drought-tolerant and actually flower best on dry soils. Problems include a tendency to show nutritional deficiencies, especially potassium; the weak wood which is susceptible to breakage in storms; the abundant seedlings which may germinate in the landscape; and the litter problem created by the falling leaves, flowers, and seedpods. Orchid-tree may need occasional pruning to develop a uniform shape when it is young. Branches tend to develop low on the trunk and droop toward the ground

forming a large bush if left unpruned. Occasional pruning during the life of the tree will help maintain a nice, neat appearance.

Propagation is by seeds, grafting, cuttings, and air-layerings.

Pests

Borers, caterpillars, mites.

Diseases

Leaf spot, leaf scorch diseases.