



Bauhinia aculeata White Orchid-Tree¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

One of the hardiest of the bauhinias, White Orchid-Tree is a deciduous to semi-evergreen tree reaching 25 to 30 feet in height with interesting twisted ascending branches which droop at the ends, an often-leaning trunk, and large, bilobed, dark green leaves (Fig. 1). The beautiful, white, three to four-inch-wide, orchid-like blooms appear in abundance from spring through summer and are followed by flat, dark brown seed pods. White Orchid-Tree makes a spectacular vase-shaped specimen, shade, or patio tree, or fits well into a mixed shrubby border provided it is grown in the full sun. The trees propagated from seed vary in form when young from one individual to the next so uniform plantings are difficult to achieve. Trees become more uniform and symmetrical as they grow older. Probably too messy and sensitive to alkaline soil for a residential or downtown street tree but would grow well and be suited for a median strip where the debris would be washed away and less noticeable. Growth in alkaline soil is usually fine, but the leaves appear yellow between the veins.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Bauhinia aculeata*

Pronunciation: bah-HIN-ee-uh ah-kew-lee-AY-tuh

Common name(s): White Orchid-Tree

Family: *Leguminosae*

USDA hardiness zones: 9 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);

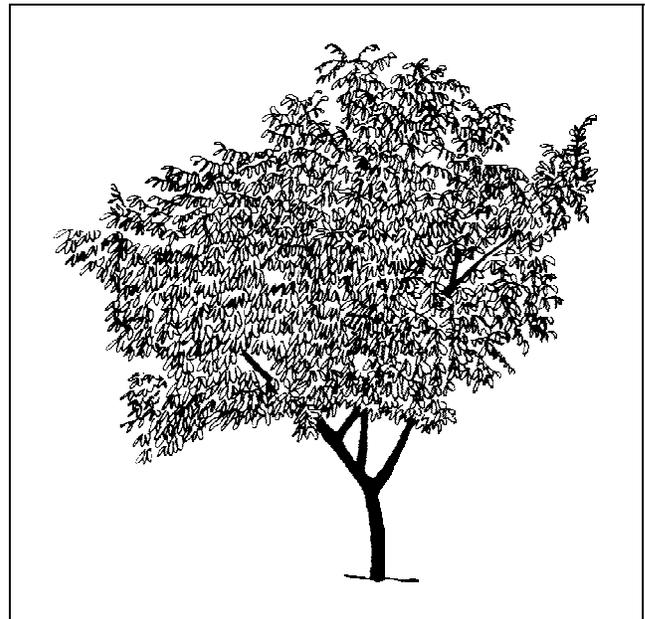


Figure 1. Middle-aged White Orchid-Tree.

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 lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; residential street tree
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

DESCRIPTION

Height: 25 to 30 feet

Spread: 15 to 25 feet

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: vase shape

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

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: white

Flower characteristics: fall flowering; showy; spring flowering; summer 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

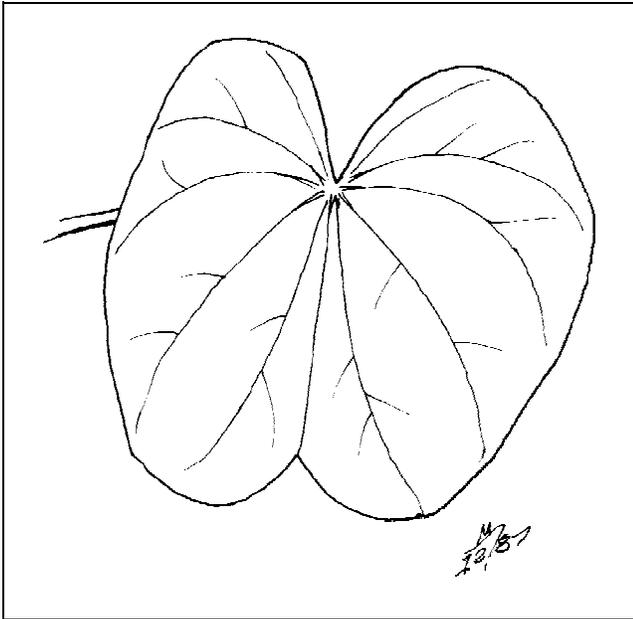


Figure 3. Foliage of White Orchid-Tree.

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

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: no special winter interest

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 benefits from some pruning early in their life to increase branchiness and to produce a form which will be suited for most landscapes. Left unpruned, many trees are beautiful, forming multiple trunks and branches close to the ground which is fine

for specimen use in a lawn area or other open-space landscapes. Purchase trees with one trunk for parking lot or other urban landscapes where vehicular clearance will be necessary. Be sure to train branches so they will grow up before they spread out. If this is not done, lower branches will droop toward the ground and they may have to be removed, disfiguring the tree. Orchid trees drop fruit, small branches and leaves periodically so some people consider it a messy tree. But regularly fertilized, Orchid-Tree is a wonderful flowering tree.

Growing in full sun or high, shifting pine shade, Orchid-Tree thrives in any well-drained soil but in alkaline soils will show interveinal chlorosis (yellowing) on the leaves. Potassium deficiency shows up as necrosis, magnesium deficiency as chlorosis. Although tolerant of drought, White Orchid-Tree can benefit from some afternoon shade, or irrigation, in hot, dry weather to prevent the blooms from shrivelling up. The flowers are followed by many brown, woody seed pods which fill the tree and could be considered unattractive on the tree in the winter and a nuisance when they drop.

Propagation is by seed, suckers, layerings, or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Potassium, magnesium and micronutrient deficiencies are common. Orchid-Tree seeds itself into the landscape.