

***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. 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

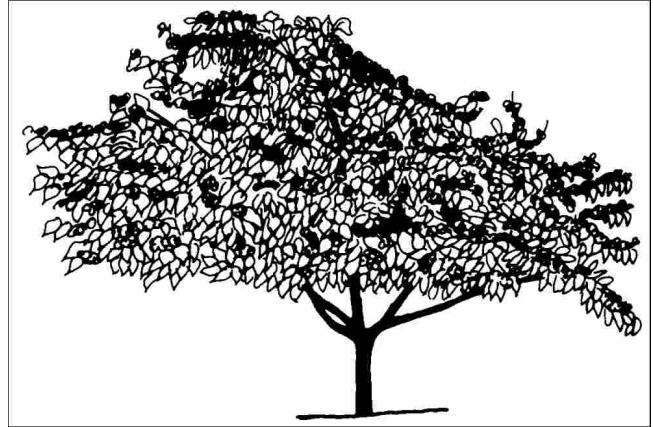


Figure 1. Middle-aged *Bauhinia purpurea*: Purple Orchid-Tree

Family: *Leguminosae*

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: has been evaluated using the IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas (Fox et al. 2005). This species is not documented in any undisturbed natural areas in Florida. Thus, it is not considered a problem species and may be used in Florida.

1. This document is ENH249, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date November 1993. Revised March 2006. Reviewed October 2003. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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Uses: reclamation; street without sidewalk; deck or patio; shade; specimen; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median

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

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: cleft, lobed



Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 30 to 35 feet

Spread: 30 to 35 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: vase, round

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Leaf shape: orbiculate

Leaf venation: palmate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: red, purple, blue

Flower characteristics: very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated, pod or pod-like

Fruit length: 6 to 12 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; can be trained to one trunk; thorns

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: medium, thin

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: yes

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

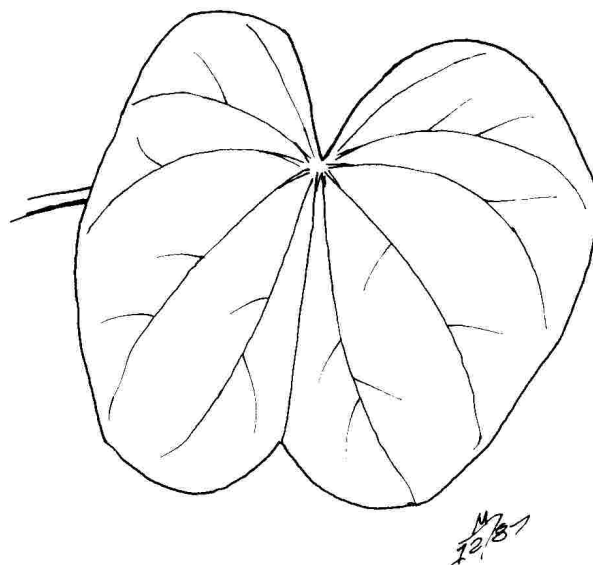


Figure 3. Foliage



Figure 4. Flower

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.

Literature Cited

Fox, A.M., D.R. Gordon, J.A. Dusky, L. Tyson, and R.K. Stocker (2005) IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas. Cited from the Internet (November 3, 2006), <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment.html>