Introduction

The fast-growing white orchid-tree grows 20- to 40-feet in height with a 20- to 30-foot-spread, the slender trunks topped with arching branches clothed in large, two-lobed, deciduous leaves. In fall, before the leaves drop, white orchid-tree is festooned with many showy and delightfully fragrant, five-inch-wide, pure white, orchid-shaped blossoms. These flowers appear on the trees from January to April and are a beautiful sight to see. The flowers are followed by 12-inch-long, slender, brown, flat seedpods which usually persist on the tree throughout the winter. This spectacular display makes orchid-tree a favorite for specimen and street-tree plantings.

General Information

Scientific name: Bauhinia variegata
Pronunciation: bah-HIN-ee-uh vair-ee-eh-GAY-tuh
Common name(s): ‘Candida’ variegated orchid-tree
Family: Leguminosae
USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Figure 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential: According to the IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida’s Natural Areas (IFAS Invasive Plant Working Group 2008), Bauhinia variegata ‘Candida’ is invasive and not recommended in the south zone in Florida. In the central zone in Florida it should be treated with caution, may be recommended but managed to prevent escape. It is not considered a problem species and may be recommended in the north zone in Florida (counties listed by zone at: http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/pdfs/assess_counties.pdf)
Uses: reclamation; street without sidewalk; deck or patio; shade; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100–200 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; specimen
Availability: not native to North America

Figure 1. Middle-aged Bauhinia variegata ‘Candida’: ‘Candida’ variegated orchid-tree.
Description
Height: 20 to 35 feet
Spread: 20 to 30 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: vase
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: medium

Foliage
Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: cleft, lobed
Leaf shape: orbiculate
Leaf venation: palmate
Leaf type and persistence: semi-evergreen, deciduous
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower
Flower color: white/cream/gray
Flower characteristics: very showy

Fruit
Fruit shape: elongated, pod or pod-like
Fruit length: 12 inches or more
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: black
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: thin, medium
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

Use and Management
White 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.

Pests
Caterpillars, mites, and borers.

Diseases
Leaf spot, leaf scorch, and mushroom root rot diseases.
**Literature Cited**