Parrotia persica: Persian Parrotia

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

Introduction

This 20 to 40-foot-high deciduous tree forms a low-branched, rounded silhouette, 20 to 35 feet wide, and often has multiple trunks, although it can be trained to a single trunk. The flowers which appear before the leaves in spring are somewhat interesting, showing no petals just a profusion of relatively inconspicuous deep crimson stamens. Fruits are not set in abundance and are of little consequence. But it is the foliage of Persian Parrotia which attracts the most attention, unfolding as reddish-purple young leaves, maturing to a lustrous, dark green through the summer, and then finally putting on a brilliant fall display of various hues of vivid yellow, burnt orange, and deep, pure scarlet. Even in winter Persian Parrotia is a striking landscape element, the much-branched canopy and multiple trunks finally able to clearly display their attractive peeling bark and spectacular form. Trunk and bark character can be displayed year-round by removing lower branches and foliage.

General Information

Scientific name: Parrotia persica
Pronunciation: par-ROE-tee-uh PER-sih-kuh
Common name(s): Persian Parrotia
Family: Hamamelidaceae

Figure 1. Middle-aged Parrotia persica: Persian Parrotia
Credits: Ed Gilman

Figure 2. Range


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USDA hardiness zones: 5A through 8B (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential: little invasive potential
Uses: tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; specimen; street without sidewalk; deck or patio; shade; highway median; container or planter
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

**Description**
- Height: 20 to 40 feet
- Spread: 20 to 35 feet
- Crown uniformity: symmetrical
- Crown shape: round, vase
- Crown density: moderate
- Growth rate: slow
- Texture: fine

**Foliage**
- Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
- Leaf type: simple
- Leaf margin: crenate, dentate, serrate
- Leaf shape: obovate, oblong
- Leaf venation: pinnate
- Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
- Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches, 4 to 8 inches
- Leaf color: green
- Fall color: yellow, orange, red
- Fall characteristic: showy

**Flower**
- Flower color: red
- Flower characteristics: showy

**Fruit**
- Fruit shape: irregular
- Fruit length: less than .5 inch
- Fruit covering: dry or hard
- Fruit color: brown
- Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**
- Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
- Pruning requirement: little required
- Breakage: resistant
- Current year twig color: brown
- Current year twig thickness: thin
- Wood specific gravity: unknown

**Culture**
- Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade
- Soil tolerances: sand; loam; clay; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained
- Drought tolerance: high
- Aerosol salt tolerance: unknown

**Other**
- Roots: not a problem
- Winter interest: yes
- Outstanding tree: yes
- Ozone sensitivity: unknown
- Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown
- Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

**Use and Management**
These ornamental characteristics and a pest-free nature make Persian Parrotia ideal for use as a specimen or street tree. Accent the tree in a landscape by setting it off by itself in a lawn or in a bed of low ground cover. Space 20 to 30 feet apart along a street or walk to create a canopy over the walk. It will not create a canopy over the street but will form a wall of wonderful foliage along the sides of a residential street. This tree should be grown and planted more.

Persian Parrotia should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained, slightly acid soil and will adapt to alkaline soil provided other cultural requirements are met. Trees will not tolerate wet soil conditions, but should show considerable drought tolerance once established.

The cultivar ‘Pendula’ reportedly forms a rounded, weeping silhouette, five to six feet high by 10 feet wide, but is rare in the trade.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

**Pests and Diseases**
No pests or diseases are of major concern. It is virtually pest free.