**Ulmus parvifolia ‘Sempervirens’: Weeping Chinese Elm**

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**Introduction**

An excellent tree that is surprisingly under-used, Chinese elm possesses many traits which make it ideal for a multitude of landscape uses. A fast-growing, deciduous or evergreen tree, Chinese elm forms a graceful, upright, rounded canopy of long, arching, and somewhat weeping branches which are clothed with two to three-inch-long, shiny, dark green, leathery leaves. This cultivar is almost evergreen in USDA hardiness zones 8b through 10 and has a more weeping habit than the species. Some specimens grow in the typical vase-shaped elm form. In colder regions of the country in fall, these leaves are transformed into various shades of red, purple, or yellow. The tree is evergreen in the southern extent of its range. The showy, exfoliating bark reveals random, mottled patterns of grey, green, orange, and brown, adding great textural and visual interest, especially to its winter silhouette. Chinese elm can reach 80 feet in height but is more often seen at 40 to 50 feet, making it an ideal shade, specimen, street, or parking lot tree.

**General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Ulmus parvifolia*

**Pronunciation:** UL-mus par-vih-FOLE-ee-uh

**Common name(s):** Weeping Chinese elm, weeping lacebark elm

**Family:** Ulmaceae

**USDA hardiness zones:** 8A through 10B (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

**Uses:** sidewalk cutout (tree pit); reclamation; urban tolerant; street without sidewalk; 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:** not native to North America

**Description**

**Height:** 35 to 40 feet

**Spread:** 35 to 50 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

**Crown shape:** weeping, vase, spreading

**Crown density:** open

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** fine

Figure 1. Young *Ulmus parvifolia* ‘Sempervirens’: weeping Chinese elm
**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement**: alternate (Fig. 3)
- **Leaf type**: simple
- **Leaf margin**: serrate, serrulate
- **Leaf shape**: obovate, elliptic (oval), ovate
- **Leaf venation**: pinnate
- **Leaf type and persistence**: deciduous
- **Leaf blade length**: less than 2 inches
- **Leaf color**: green
- **Fall color**: red, purple, yellow
- **Fall characteristic**: showy

**Trunk and Branches**

- **Trunk/bark/branches**: branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
- **Pruning requirement**: needed for strong structure
- **Breakage**: resistant
- **Current year twig color**: gray, brown
- **Current year twig thickness**: thin
- **Wood specific gravity**: unknown

**Culture**

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

**Other**

- **Roots**: not a problem
- **Winter interest**: yes
- **Outstanding tree**: yes
- **Ozone sensitivity**: unknown
- **Verticillium wilt susceptibility**: susceptible
- **Pest resistance**: resistant to pests/diseases

**Use and Management**

Select trees with branches spaced along one trunk. It is not essential that this trunk be straight. Buy from nurseries who understand how to train and prune this tree for street and parking lot use, otherwise you may be trimming and pruning low drooping branches on a regular basis. In addition, please do not confuse it with *Ulmus pumila*, the Siberian elm. This tree is far inferior to *Ulmus parvifolia* and should not be planted, except perhaps in extreme climates such as western Oklahoma and Texas where the limits of most other trees are tested.

Chinese elm is often topped in the nursery to create a full head of foliage and branches originate from one point on the trunk. There is not enough room on the trunk to support this type of branch structure, and some may split out from the tree as it ages. This tree may take more effort to properly train and prune than some other species but it is well worth the effort. It will have a long service life in urban areas with proper training early on.

The root system is comprised of several very large-diameter roots which can grow to great distances from the trunk. These are usually located fairly close to the surface of the soil and can occasionally lift sidewalks. They can get into sewer lines causing severe damage. But they are usually...
not a problem and should not be cause to eliminate this tree from your urban tree planting program. The Chinese elm species is among the top urban trees on most recommended tree lists in the south and midwest.

Chinese elm will grow in full sun on a wide range of soils, adapting easily to extremes in pH (including alkaline) or moisture, and tolerates cold, urban heat, and wind. Trees will look their best, though, when grown in moist, well-drained, fertile soil but they adapt to drought and the extremes of urban sites. Very suitable for street tree pits, parking lot islands, and other confined soil spaces.

Many other cultivars are available: ‘Catlin’ is dwarf; ‘Drake’, USDA hardiness zones 7 to 9, has small, dark green leaves, sweeping, upright branches forming a rounded crown, and greater leaf retention being almost evergreen in California and Florida; ‘Dynasty’ has smooth, dark grey bark, smaller leaves and is vase-shaped, with red fall color in the north; ‘Frosty’ has a small (0.75-inch-long), white-margined leaf which may revert back to green; ‘True Green’ has glossy, deep green leaves, a graceful, round-headed outline, and tends to be evergreen; and ‘Pendula’, with weeping growth habit.

Propagation is by cuttings, or grafts.

**Pests**

Borers and chewing insects infest elm. It shows considerable resistance to elm leaf beetle and Japanese beetle.

**Diseases**

It is usually resistant to Dutch elm disease and phloem necrosis. Trunk cankers may develop on young trunks where soil is excessively wet. Twig blight is also a problem.