Araucaria araucana: Monkey Puzzle Tree

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Introduction

Monkey puzzle tree is a large, bizarre evergreen, 60 to 70 feet tall and 30 to 35 feet wide, which forms a loose, see-through, pyramidal shape with a straight trunk. The tree is so open in habit you could almost look at it and not see it. The leaves are dark green, stiff, with sharp needles densely arranged on horizontal, irregular, upwardly sweeping branches. Monkey puzzle tree makes an attractive, novelty specimen for a large, open yard or commercial landscape. It is normally planted only as an oddity someplace in the rear of a landscape out of view from most passers-by but could be the specimen feature in a large oriental landscape.

General Information

Scientific name: Araucaria araucana
Pronunciation: air-ah-KAIR-ee-uh air-ah-KAY-nuh
Common name(s): Monkey puzzle tree
Family: Araucariaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential: little invasive potential
Uses: indoors; specimen
Availability: not native to North America

Description

Height: 60 to 70 feet
Spread: 30 to 35 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: pyramidal

Figure 1. Mature Araucaria araucana: Monkey puzzle tree
Credits: Ed Gilman

Figure 2. Range
**Araucaria araucana: Monkey puzzle tree**

**Crown density:** open  
**Growth rate:** moderate  
**Texture:** coarse

### Foliage
- **Leaf arrangement:** spiral (Fig. 3)  
- **Leaf type:** simple  
- **Leaf margin:** entire  
- **Leaf shape:** ovate, lanceolate  
- **Leaf venation:** parallel  
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen, needled evergreen  
- **Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches  
- **Leaf color:** green  
- **Fall color:** no color change  
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

![Figure 3. Foliage](image)

### Culture
- **Light requirement:** full sun  
- **Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; acidic; alkaline; well-drained  
- **Drought tolerance:** moderate  
- **Aerosol salt tolerance:** unknown

### Other
- **Roots:** can form large surface roots  
- **Winter interest:** no  
- **Outstanding tree:** no  
- **Ozone sensitivity:** unknown  
- **Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown  
- **Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

### Use and Management
Monkey puzzle tree should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil and receive regular waterings. It tolerates some drought and will grow well in clay soil.

### Pests and Diseases
No pests or diseases are of major concern. Scales, sooty mold, leaf spots.

### Flower
- **Flower color:** unknown  
- **Flower characteristics:** not showy

### Fruit
- **Fruit shape:** oval, cone  
- **Fruit length:** 3 to 6 inches, 6 to 12 inches  
- **Fruit covering:** dry or hard  
- **Fruit color:** brown, tan  
- **Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

### Trunk and Branches
- **Trunk/bark/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns  
- **Pruning requirement:** little required  
- **Breakage:** resistant  
- **Current year twig color:** green, brown  
- **Current year twig thickness:** medium, thick  
- **Wood specific gravity:** unknown