**Paulownia tomentosa: Princess-Tree**

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

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**Introduction**

This native of China gives a most dramatic, coarse-textured appearance, with its huge heart-shaped leaves and large clusters of lavender flowers in the spring. Flowers are borne before leaf emergence so they stand out nicely, especially against an evergreen background. With a rapid growth rate, Princess-Tree can reach 50 feet in height with an equal spread in an open landscape. Most trees are seen 30 to 40 feet tall and wide. It thrives best in deep, moist but well-drained soil, sheltered from the wind, and has become naturalized in many parts of the South. Fuzzy, brown flower buds form in early autumn, persist over the winter, and bloom in early spring. Buds may freeze in very cold weather and drop off. Woody seed capsules form in autumn containing up to two-thousand seeds. They persist through the winter. Seeds germinate readily in the landscape and wherever they are carried. Leaves drop within one week following the first frost in autumn.

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**General Information**

- **Scientific name:** *Paulownia tomentosa*
- **Pronunciation:** pah-LOE-nee-uh toe-men-TOE-suh
- **Common name(s):** Princess-Tree, Empress-Tree, Paulownia
- **Family:** Scrophulariaceae
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 5B through 9B (Figure 2)
- **Origin:** not native to North America
- **Invasive potential:** invasive non-native
- **Uses:** urban tolerant; reclamation
- **Availability:** not native to North America

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Paulownia tomentosa: Princess-Tree

Description
Height: 40 to 50 feet
Spread: 40 to 50 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: vase, round
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

Foliage
Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Figure 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: ovate, cordate
Leaf venation: palmate, pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches, 8 to 12 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower
Flower color: lavender
Flower characteristics: very showy

Figure 2. Range

Figure 3. Foliage

Figure 4. Paulownia tomentosa flowers.
Credits: William S. Justice @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

Figure 5. Fruit.
Credits: Suzanne Foster @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

Fruit
Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: 1 to 3 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; typically one trunk; thorns

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: thick

Wood specific gravity: unknown

**Culture**

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade

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

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

**Other**

Roots: can form large surface roots

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: tolerant

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

**Use and Management**

Close-grained Paulownia wood has become extremely valuable during the last 15 years. It may be the highest priced saw timber in the country at this time. It is exported to Japan where it is milled into furniture and jewelry boxes. The wood is very lightweight and makes good crating material.

Princess-Tree should be planted where falling flowers and leaves are not objectionable. In some areas, the tree is often considered a “weed” tree, and has naturalized in the edge of woodlands. If it is planted, consider placing it in a park or other open-space area.

**Diseases**

It has no known insect enemies.

There have been occasional reports of problems with mildew, leaf-spot and twig canker.

**Literature Cited**