Orchid Tree

Bauhinia purpurea



Orchid Tree flowers
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 20 feet

Spread: 20 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 9

Other Names: Butterfly Tree, syn. Phanera purpurea

Description:

A small to medium deciduous tree, producing interesting, orchid-like violet-lavender flowers in spring; foliage drops in early spring just before blooming; a colorful accent for warm, dry locations once established

Ornamental Features

Orchid Tree features showy clusters of violet orchid-like flowers with lavender overtones and a red flare at the ends of the branches from early to mid spring. It has attractive forest green deciduous foliage. The lobed leaves are highly ornamental but do not develop any appreciable fall color. The fruits are showy brown pods displayed from early to late summer. The fruit can be messy if allowed to drop on the lawn or walkways, and may require occasional clean-up.

Landscape Attributes

Orchid Tree is a multi-stemmed deciduous tree with an upright spreading habit of growth. Its average texture blends into the landscape, but can be balanced by one or two finer or coarser trees or shrubs for an effective composition.

This tree will require occasional maintenance and upkeep, and should only be pruned after flowering to avoid removing any of the current season's flowers. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Messy
- Self-Seeding

Orchid Tree is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Mass Planting
- Hedges/Screening
- General Garden Use
- Container Planting

Planting & Growing

Orchid Tree will grow to be about 20 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 20 feet. It has a low canopy with a typical clearance of 3 feet from the ground, and is suitable for planting under power lines. It grows at a fast rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for approximately 30 years.

This tree does best in full sun to partial shade. It is very adaptable to both dry and moist growing conditions, but will not tolerate any standing water. It is considered to be drought-tolerant, and thus makes an ideal choice for xeriscaping or the moisture-conserving landscape. It is not particular as to soil type, but has a definite preference for acidic soils. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution. This species is not originally from North America.

Orchid Tree is a fine choice for the yard, but it is also a good selection for planting in outdoor pots and containers. Its large size and upright habit of growth lend it for use as a solitary accent, or in a composition surrounded by smaller plants around the base and those that spill over the edges. It is even sizeable enough that it can be grown alone in a suitable container. Note that when grown in a container, it may not perform exactly as indicated on the tag - this is to be expected. Also note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.