



Firmiana simplex Chinese Parasoltree¹

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INTRODUCTION

Chinese Parasoltree has a very unusual appearance for a deciduous tree, having green stems and bark and extremely large, three to five-lobed bright green leaves (Fig. 1). Most people either love it or hate it due to its striking habit and coarse texture. Each leaf is up to 12 inches across and casts as much shade as an actual parasol. Chinese Parasoltree has a dense, upright, oval canopy and reaches 35 to 50 feet in height, spreading 15 to 20 feet. In June or July, 10 to 20-inch-long, upright, loose, terminal panicles of yellow/green blooms appear and are followed by the production of peculiar pods which split open into four petal-like sections to reveal the small, round seeds. These pods are often harvested for use in winter decorations. The foliage of Chinese Parasoltree can turn brilliant yellow before dropping in fall to reveal an interesting branching structure of green stems. The yellow complements the green trunk very nicely.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Firmiana simplex*

Pronunciation: fer-mee-AY-nuh SIM-plecks

Common name(s): Chinese Parasoltree, Varnish-Tree

Family: *Sterculiaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7 through 9 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

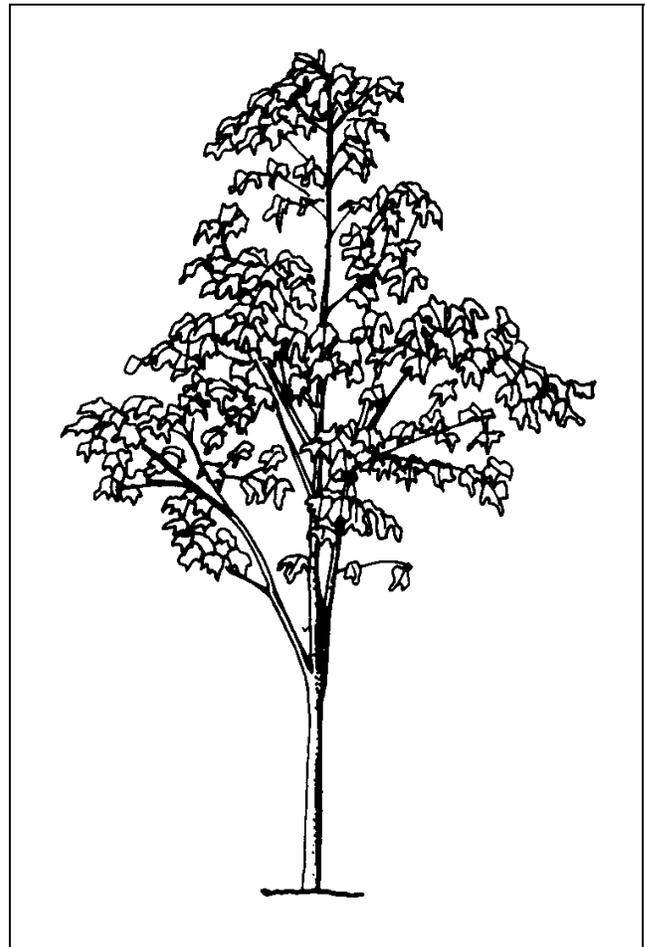


Figure 1. Young Chinese Parasoltree.

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 30 to 50 feet
Spread: 15 to 30 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: oval; upright
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: lobed; undulate
Leaf shape: star-shaped
Leaf venation: palmate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches; 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: yellow
Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: white; yellow
Flower characteristics: showy; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated; oval
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: green; tan
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure
Breakage: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break
Current year twig color: green; gray

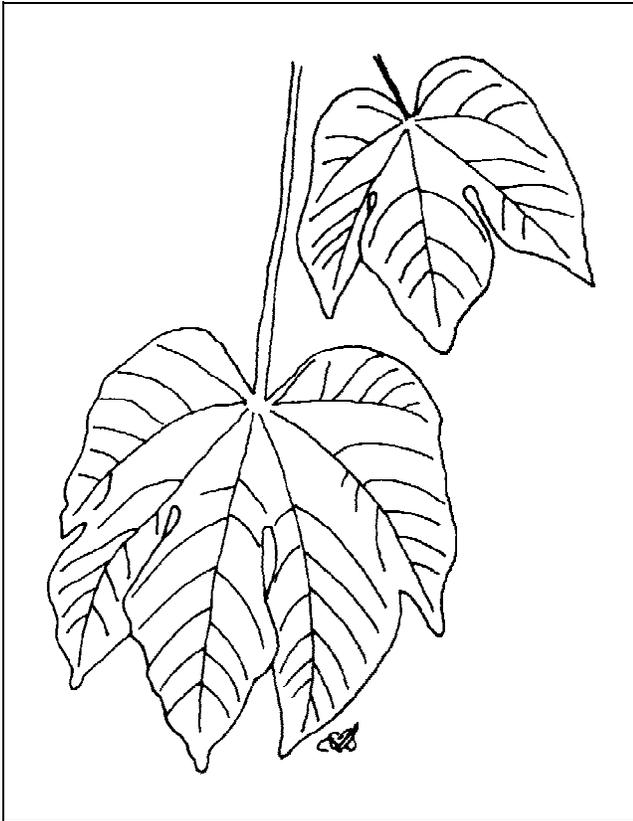


Figure 3. Foliage of Chinese Parasoltree.

Current year twig thickness: thick

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun;
tree grows in full sun

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

Drought tolerance: high

Other

Roots: surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere
with mowing

Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to
unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter
trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental
features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: No entries found.

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the
tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

The tree appears "out of place" to some horticulturists but many people enjoy the dramatic impact one or several of these trees can have on a landscape. The tree lends a tropical effect and is probably best used only occasionally as a specimen. It could be tried as a street tree on a small scale but may be objectionable due to the so-called messy nature of the tree. Leaves are large, decompose slowly and blow around in the landscape after they fall. Falling fruits also contribute to the mess but they are dry. The tree looks a bit scraggly in winter with old flower stalks persisting on the branch tips. There is a tree in Raleigh, North Carolina which is 45 feet tall with an 18-inch-diameter trunk and still growing. But on many sites, count on about 30-years of service unless located in an area with lots of soil space and pruned regularly to develop good form.

Branches can be poorly attached to the trunk so be sure that branches grow no larger than about half the diameter of the trunk. This will help ensure a stronger attachment to the tree. Roots often grow close to the surface in clay soil especially near the trunk.

Chinese Parasoltree should be grown a full-sun, wind-protected location. Trees will grow in shade with an upright, almost columnar form as they reach for the sunlight. Trees should be regularly watered when young but become drought-tolerant once established. They tolerate clay soil but often develop root rot if the soil is not well-drained. Not a downtown tree.

The cultivar 'Variegata' has green and white-dappled leaves. Rare in the nursery trade.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests and Diseases

A trunk scale may kill a tree if not controlled.