***Albizia julibrissin* Durazz.**

Fabaceae (Ingeae Tribe)
Source of: hé huān pí, hé huān huā 合歡皮, 合歡花
silktree bark, flower

Summary Description

Silktree is listed as an exotic invasive in the southern United States but is valued as an ornamental and a street tree, prized for its feathery leaves and delicate pink flowers. The Harvard plant hunter E.H. Wilson brought along a hardy cultivar when he introduced the tree to North America a century ago (*Albizia julibrissin* 'E.H. Wilson'), which is hardy to Zone 5. Fast-growing to 40 feet in height, the silktree's bipinnately compound leaves can be 20 inches long, and when young are sensitive to touch and light. The grayish brown bark is relatively smooth. Terminal panicles of frothy pink flowers bud in June to July. Seeds are borne in strap-like pods to 6 inches in length that dangle from the branches in early autumn. Estimated time to first harvest of buds is 6 years, for the bark 10 years.

Propagation

Dry pods until they shatter to harvest seeds. Scarify seeds with hot water and soak 24 hours. Plant in a deep 72-cell tray, barely cover with potting medium and press down, keep flat warm and moist. Germination occurs in 7-14 days. Thin to one seedling per cell. Root cuttings taken in spring may be an alternate form of propagation, although this tree is relatively easy from seed.

Cultivation

In 2-3 months after germination, transplant seedlings from flats to individual quart pots. Transplant again in 6 months to gallon treepots. Do not plant outside until the root ball is robust, or the tree will die back to ground the following winter resulting in multiple trunks. Plant in full sun to part shade.

Harvest & Processing

Consider growing different trees for flowers and bark. The tree may begin to flower six years after planting and will bear more flowers as it ages. For hé huān huā, collect buds before the flowers open fully, use extreme care when drying. Lay buds in one layer on a tray, use maximum airflow and low temperatures (below 110°F), stop before the material is brittle. For tree bark, harvest a long vertical strip from trees over 10 years old. Cut into evenly sized pieces half an inch wide and up to 2 inches long. (See next page for photo of hé huān pí dispensary material.)

References

Flora of China: http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=2&taxon_id=200011875
Bensky *Materia Medica* page: 935

Alternate species

None.


Trunk, flower, pod photos taken at Arnold Arboretum Harvard University