***Eucommia ulmoides* Oliv.**

Eucommiaceae
Source of: dù zhòng 杜仲
hardy rubber tree bark

Summary Description

A slow-growing but long-lived, deciduous, dioecious tree to 60 feet in height. Hardy to Zone 5. This tree is the only species in its genus and family. Farmed on plantations in China, the species is almost gone from the wild. The sapwood, gray-brown bark and leaves all contain latex, so that leaves broken apart reveal thin white strands. Reddish brown buds appear in April, followed by male and female flowers (separate trees) that are wind-pollinated. The elliptical, veined leaves have a serrate edge and a pointed tip. Seeds with an inch-long, flat, papery casing are borne in clusters by the female tree, ripen in late autumn and are shed with the yellowed leaves.

Propagation

The trees will self-sow in Zone 7 or warmer. Germination from seed is not difficult. Collect brown (not yellow) seeds from the ground in autumn, hot water (160°F) soak and stratify warm (70°F) 3 months and cold (40°F) 3 months. Alternatively, dry the seeds and keep refrigerated. In spring sow over bottom heat, 14-21 days. The seedlings should be transplanted to quart pots, overwintered above freezing, then transplanted to tall gallon pots after the roots fill the quart. Do not plant out (especially in Zones 5 or 6) until the roots have filled the gallon pot, usually the third year.

Cultivation

The tree lends itself to a savannah or orchard-style scheme, but the crown should receive full sun. Plant several trees in March or April in a well-drained loam without amendments to the planting hole. Mulch around the base of the tree but do not pile the mulch against the trunk. Tree trunk protectors may be used, especially in locations susceptible to deer. Prune off side shoots to obtain a long, vertical trunk amenable to eventual harvest of the bark.

Harvest & Processing

Trees should be at least 15 years old before the bark is harvested in long, vertical strips or “quills” in springtime. The rough outer bark may be discarded. The inner surface turns purplish-brown when dried, and is cut into rectangular strips or decocting pieces with latex visible.

Note: The leaves (dù zhòng yè 杜仲叶) are also used in contemporary practice, in addition to the bark. Harvest green leaves in late summer or autumn and dry in a quick but low temperature process.

References

Flora of China: http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=2&taxon_id=200010586
Bensky *Materia Medica* page: 790

CHINESE MEDICINAL PLANT FACT SHEETS © 2018 Jean Giblette
NEW YORK GROWN CHINESE MEDICINAL HERBS PROJECT

All photos except seeds and seedlings taken at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, Jamaica Plain MA

Female tree with yellow seed clusters ripening in October.

Bark of a 100+ year old tree.