University of California Cooperative Extension
Central Coast & South Region

Center for Landscape and Urban Horticulture

Fruitless Mulberry Tree
Morus alba

By Kathie Carter
Cooperative Extension/Botany Plant Sciences Department
University California Riverside

Introduction:
Mulberry trees are deciduous with bright green, lobed leaves are of variable form, size, and shape on the same tree. The fruitless forms are better for the home landscape. They make excellent shade trees and do well in the desert. They can grow 20-60 feet tall. These trees like the heat, tolerate alkaline soils, and are resistant to Texas root rot. Fruitless mulberry trees can take some drought once established, but do grow faster with regular watering and fertilizing. These trees even grow at the beach successfully. They have heavy surface roots, so it is recommended that they are planted at least 6 feet from walkways, driveways, or foundations as the roots can lift and crack the concrete.

Varieties:
Morus alba (white mulberry) grows up to 50 feet high and produces extremely sweet, pinkish, white, or purplish berries. There are several, attractive fruitless selections or varieties of the white mulberry. They are male trees and include 'Stribling', 'Kingan', and 'Urban'. *M. alba* 'Pendula' is a weeping mulberry, and 'Chaparral' is a non-fruiting, weeping mulberry. *Morus alba* var. *tatarica* is especially cold-resistant. Other mulberry species include, (fruitless), *M. nigra* (black mulberry) and *M. rubra* (red mulberry, native to North America) are other less common species of mulberry.

History:
These deciduous trees, commonly known as Mulberry trees, grow wild in North America and Asia. *M. alba* and its selections are the most commonly planted mulberry. The silkworm feeds on this species, and it was used in the past to raise the worms for silk production. Raising silk worms in America did not prove to be popular, and since the fruits of the fruiting varieties can not be kept long, or shipped, the fruiting varieties are not used much anymore. Mulberry trees can grow quite large, but when out in the open usually develop a short, stout trunk and a thick, wide crown of branches. Mulberry trees are long lived and often rejuvenate themselves from dormant buds near the base of old trees. Trees that have been blown down and have viable roots may continue to grow and fruit for many years.

Landscape Use:
Mulberry trees are able to grow in a variety of soil conditions and in climates with long, hot summers, such as inland valley and desert areas of southern California, and they are suitable for growing near the coast as long as they are sheltered from winds. They are able to withstand pollution found in cities and suburban areas. In the spring and early summer, mulberry trees produce male and female HflowersH in ½-inch clusters on the same tree or on separate trees. On the fruiting varieties, the flowers and ensuing fruit can be very messy. Fruits are edible but can stain surfaces.

General Care:
White Mulberries will grow in all areas of the U.S.; the Black Mulberries can only be grown in warm climates. New plants may need to be carefully staked since they develop large crowns rather quickly and tend to be top heavy. This can snap the tender young trunks in high winds. Grow them in full sun or light shade in almost any HsoilH. Trees will grow the best, however, in deep, moist, but well-drained loam. Once the trees are established, they will withstand periods of drought. Pruning should be done in the winter after all leaves have fallen. It is usually necessary to remove some of the lower branches every few years. For the first few years the branches may grow long and droop from their own weight, so it is best to prune them back and shorten them to maintain a better shape.

Propagation:
Cuttings of young wood (softwood cuttings) or ripened wood (hardwood cuttings) may be used to propagate these trees. The cuttings can be placed in a closed cold frame or other enclosure. Alternatively, grafting or seeds may also be used for propagation.

Bibliography:
1. Gilman, Edward F.; Watson, Dennis G**.** 1994. *Morus alba* Fruitless Cultivars. Forest Service Department of Agriculture. Fact Sheet ST-408.
2. Brenzel, K.N. ed. 2001. Sunset western garden book. Menlo Park. Sunset Publishing.
3. Wyman, Donald. 1977. Wymans' Gardening Encyclopedia. MacMillian Publishing Co., Inc. New York, N.Y. Pages 705-706.
4. Maino, Evelyn; Howard, Frances. 1955. *Morus*. University of California Press. Page 58.

7-31-07