



Purple Orchid Tree and Its Relatives

(*Bauhinia variegata* or *B. purpurea*)



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Introduction:

The purple orchid tree is a fast growing tree that can grow up to 35 feet tall and develop multiple trunks. The tree is semi-evergreen with large leaves that are, two lobed and heart-shaped. The flowers are large and very showy, about five inches wide with a slight fragrance. The flower resembles an orchid, thus the plant's common name. The trees usually bloom in the fall between September through November. When the flowers are done blooming large, 12-inch long seed pods develop and hang from the branches. This tree can be a perfect addition to any garden as a specimen plant because of the spectacular flower show. The flower is also known as the poor mans orchid. Flowers range from purple, pink and white.

General Information:

Scientific name: *Bauhinia variegata* or *B. purpurea*. Common Name: Purple orchid tree.

Family: Leguminosae, Fabaceae.

Origin: India, China (not native to North America).

Uses: In parking lots, streets and as a specimen or general landscape tree.

Varieties:

There are several different species of *Bauhinia* although they are not easy to find. Some are evergreen, have red, orange, pink or white colored flowers, bloom at different times of the year and are originate from different countries. The most common and most frequently planted in Southern California is the *B. variegata* (*purpurea*).

General Care:

The purple orchid tree should be planted in full sun and watered deeply but infrequently in summer; established trees need to be watered thoroughly about every 10 days during the warmer months of the year. The tree can grow to be up to 35 feet in height. As a young tree or shrub they can be staked until they grow taller as the tree has multi-trunks and can easily break in winds.

Fertilization:

There are no special fertilizer requirements documented for this species.

Pests and Diseases:

Borers, caterpillars and mites are occasional but infrequent pests that can affect this tree. Leaf spot and leaf scorch can be seen on some trees during mid-summer.

Bibliography:

1. <http://hort.ufl.edu/trees/BAUPURA.pdf>. Link checked 4/24/07.
2. Brenzel, K.N. (ed). 2001. Sunset Garden Book Menlo Park: Sunset Publishing.
3. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bauhinia>. Link checked 4/23/07.

