

Catalpa speciosa - Northern Catalpa or Cigar Tree (*Bignoniaceae*)

Catalpa speciosa is a large tree with winter persistent, elongated, thin pods, white inflorescences in mid-June, large, ovate medium green leaves and bold character.

FEATURES

Form

- large deciduous, flowering tree
- to 60' tall x 40' wide
- upright oval to irregular shape
- growth rate rapid at first (>18" per year) but slows down with age
- considered short-lived in its native habitat (50 years)

Culture

- full sun to partial shade
- very tolerant of soil type, but prefers deep, moist, fertile soil
- withstands wet or dry and alkaline conditions and extremely hot, dry environments (urban tolerant)
- rare availability; B&B form

Foliage

- opposite to whorled, simple leaves
- very large (10" long x 6" wide, including the long petiole)
- light to medium green
- very pubescent beneath
- autumn color yellowish green to yellow-brown; poor

Flowers

- 6" erect inflorescences (panicles) of several flowers in early- to mid-June
- white with a purple flare
- 2" flowers are bell-shaped and attractive from a long distance
- flowering for about 1 week, then covering the ground with white petals

Fruits

- 1.5' long thin pods, slightly curving but generally straight



- persisting throughout the winter and into spring, finally splitting along their axis into two halves and abscising
- seeds fringed and dispersed by wind

Twigs

- stout, with prominent lenticels and rounded leaf scars (scars have depressed centers)
- yellowish-brown to tan
- false terminal

Trunk

- brown to gray, usually with deep furrows and tall ridges; sometimes scaly

USAGE

Function

- large shade tree
- flowering tree in early to mid-June

Texture

- bold in foliage and when bare

Assets

- coarse-textured large tree
- flowers prominently in mid-June; very noticeable display
- furrowed bark
- high urban tolerance
- tolerates poor sites

Liabilities

- fruit pod litter in winter and spring
- small branches prone to storm damage (enhancing the bold character)

Habitat

- Zones 4 to 8
- Native to the Ohio Valley and mid-south of the U.S. (Illinois and Indiana to Western Tennessee and Northern Arkansas)

SELECTIONS

Alternates

- trees that flower in late spring or early summer (*Koelreuteria paniculata*, *Styphnolobium japonicum*); large shade trees (*Celtis occidentalis*); trees with year-round bold texture (*Aesculus glabra*, *Aesculus flava*, *Gymnocladus dioica*)

Cultivars – Variants – Related species

- the species form is the only one in the trade
- Catalpa bignonioides* - Southern Catalpa - the southern version, being about half as tall as *C. speciosa*; zones 5 to 9
- Catalpa bungei* - Umbrella Tree - an unusual, small growing tree of Japanese origin with a tight, rounded head of attractive foliage. Typically 12-14' x 10-12', with a rounded shape. Trees are grafted on 5' standards. Flowers are white accented with purple spots, blooming in clusters in July. A charming small tree to accent the landscape, frame an entranceway, or be displayed as a landscape specimen (from Lake Co. Nursery catalog)