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 dioicus)

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 sports, 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)