Morus alba - White or Common Mulberry (*Moraceae*)

Morus alba is a weedy tree that has become naturalized in the Eastern U.S. Weeping forms of White Mulberry that are fruitless make acceptable architectural elements in the constructed landscape.

FEATURES

Form

-the species is a large tree (up to 60' tall x 60' wide)
-male cultivars (fruitless) are smaller in size (35-40' tall x 35-40' wide)
-broad, rounded-top habit
-moderate to rapid growth rate

Culture

-will grown in virtually any soil except wet areas
-urban tolerant, will withstand drought, air pollution, salt spray, compacted soils
-easily transplanted and adaptable
-selected cultivars (mainly the weeping forms) are moderately available
-numerous cosmetic and serious diseases (bacterial blight, cankers, mildew) and pests (scales and mites) affect this tree, especially in hot, humid environments

Foliage

-alternate arrangement
-leaves are simple, often lobed (both types common on 1 branch)
-margins are serrated
-shape of the leaf blade is ovate, but with a fairly sharp (acute) tip
-leaf base is rounded or cordate
-petiole distinct, ca. 1" long
-leaf surface smooth, dark green, and often shiny
-no distinct autumn color

Flowers

-plants may be monoecious (separate male and female flowers on the same plants) or dioecious (male and female flowers on separate plants) [=polygamo-dioecious]
-small, greenish flowers
-stalked
-hanging catkins
-not showy

Fruits

-cultivars are generally fruitless
-in the species, the fruit is an edible berry-like structure (technically, a collective fruit, not a true berry)

Twigs

-thin, green to brownish-gray
-smooth and shiny

Trunk

-the bark on young branches orangish and becomes darker brown with age

USAGE

Function

-weeping cultivars are interesting accent or specimen plants.
-where a relatively fast-growing, weeping tree is wanted, Weeping Mulberry can make a unique accent plant

Texture

-coarse when bare
-medium in leaf

Assets

-urban tolerant (salt tolerant; may be used by seaside)
-strong architectural form for weeping cultivars
-generally trouble-free

Liabilities

-limited seasonal appeal
-messy fruit litter (for the fruiting species)
-numerous pest and diseases
-weak-wooded

Habitat

-Zones 5-8
-Native to Eastern and Central China

SELECTIONS

Alternates

-other weeping trees/shrubs (*Caragana arborescens* 'Pendula', *Malus* Royal Fountain® ('Huber'), 'Louisa' or 'Red Jade', *Prunus* x Snow Fountains™ ('Snofozam'), *Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdownii', etc.)
-other tough, urban tolerant trees (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, *Gleditsia triacanthos* var. *inermis*, *Ulmus* hybrid such as 'Pioneer' and 'Homestead', etc.)

Cultivars - Variants - Related species

-*Morus alba* 'Chaparral' - Fruitless Weeping Mulberry - pendulous cultivar grafted onto a 4-5' standard resulting in a distinct, umbrella-like architectural form due to its long weeping branches that give a dense canopy
-*Morus alba* 'Pendula' - a weeping form reaching a 20' x 20'. White to purple fruit produced in summer.
-***Morus rubra*** - Red Mulberry - a native American tree distributed through the east (from Kansas east and New York south), found in Ohio in fertile, moist soils, floodplains, prairies, hills, and pastures. Leaves of the red mulberry are larger and thicker than those of white mulberry, blunt-toothed and often lobed. They are rough on their upper surfaces and pubescent underneath.

Note: *Morus alba* was initially introduced from China for silkworm production; the tree was also widely planted for its edible fruit. Unfortunately the species has become naturalized and is considered weedy. The white mulberry is so-named for the color of its buds, rather than the color of its fruit. The fruitless cultivars, especially those that are weeping can find use in the constructed landscape as they offer a distinct architectural shape and wide adaptability to stressful conditions. The upright fruitless cultivars may find use in more extreme environments where few other trees will grow.