

Salix purpurea - Purpleosier Willow, Blue Arctic Willow or Basket Willow (*Salicaceae*)

Salix purpurea is known for its nearly linear, fine-textured, blue-green upperside, silvery-blue underside foliage. Purpleosier Willow is also known for purplish young stems, wet site or dry site tolerance, bicolored foliage in the breeze, and suckering habit that aids in erosion control.

FEATURES

Form

- medium- to large-sized shrub
- maturing at about 10' tall x 10' wide, although sometimes larger
- upright oval growth habit in youth, quickly becoming rounded and spreading with age
- rapid growth rate



Culture

- full sun to partial shade
- performs best in full sun in moist to wet soils of average fertility; very adaptable to poor soils, soils of various pH, dry soils, and drought, but not especially tolerant of the combination of heat and high humidity
- propagated primarily by rooted stem cuttings
- many potential diseases (including stem cankers) and pests affect members of the willow family, but for *S. purpurea*, the problems are cosmetic in their damage and relatively minor, and generally overcome by the vigor of the shrub
- moderately available, primarily in container form
- when this shrub gets too large for its allocated space or simply looks untidy, it can be subjected to rejuvenation pruning (taken down to anywhere from 4"-2' above the ground, preferably anytime from late winter to mid-summer), and the new shoots and suckers will quickly sprout and soon overwhelm the stumps in a mass of vigorous stems and foliage

Foliage

- leaves are blue-green, alternate to spiraled, linear to oblanceolate, serrulate, with silvery-blue undersides and short petioles
- leaves are densely arranged along the very thin stems, and easily flutter and ripple in the breezes as the stems sway in unison
- summer foliage color holds well into autumn, either abscising with essentially the same



color, or as a weak yellowish green that is ornamentally ineffective

Flowers

- dioecious, light green to greenish-yellow, in late Apr. and early May, as upright, relatively stiff catkins that are about 1-2" long, generally parallel to the stems, co-emergent with the foliage, ornamentally insignificant, and often unnoticed

Fruits

- ornamentally insignificant fruits containing small seeds occur on female plants

Twigs

- first season's growth matures as purplish-red stems with shiny red buds,
- stems branch repeatedly in the dense canopy

-stems can be harvested and used in the production of baskets (hence one of the common names)

Trunk

not applicable (except for *Salix purpurea* 'Pendula', which is grafted onto a *Salix* trunk standard)

USAGE

Function

- specimen, group planting, or mass planting shrub, excellent when used near bodies of water, as an informal hedge, as a deciduous screen, on embankments for erosion control (in dry or wet soils), at the border for naturalizing, or as a solitary shrub whose fine texture and bicolor effect in the breeze is a great companion plant to the mid-sized or taller ornamental grasses

Texture

- ultra-fine texture in foliage and when bare
- thick density in foliage and when bare

Assets

- fine-textured, blue-green, nearly linear foliage
- silvery undersides of the leaves create a rippling bicolored effect in the breeze
- rapid growth and establishment
- wet site or dry site tolerant
- takes very well to shearing or heavy rejuvenation pruning
- very cold hardy

Liabilities

- may sucker from nearby roots with age, forming a broad colony (this may be an asset in naturalizing or screening situations)
- poor autumn color
- not adaptable to the heat and humidity of the Southern U.S.

Habitat

- Zones 3 to 6
- Native to Europe, North Africa, Central Asia, and Japan

SELECTIONS

Alternates

- ultra-fine-textured shrubs (*Acer palmatum* 'Crimson Queen', *Rhamnus frangula* 'Asplenifolia', etc.)
- blue-green foliated companion herbaceous plants (*Boltonia asteroides*, *Festuca glauca*, *Helictotrichon sempervirens*, *Panicum virgatum* 'Heavy Metal', etc.)
- plants for embankment erosion control (*Coronilla varia*, *Euonymus alatus*, *Lespedeza thunbergii*, *Hamamelis vernalis*, *Myrica pensylvanica*, *Rhus glabra*, etc.)
- companion ornamental grasses (or grass-like plants) of medium or fine texture for dry to moist sites (*Miscanthus sinensis*, *Pennisetum alopecuroides*, *Phalaris arundinaceae* var. *picta*) or moist to wet sites (*Acorus gramineus* 'Variegatus', *Calamagrostis acutiflora*, *Carex muskingumensis*, *Equisetum*, *Glyceria maxima* 'Variegata', *Panicum virgatum*, various Bamboos, etc.)

Cultivars – Variants – Related species

- S. purpurea* 'Nana' - compact form, to 6' x 6', the most common form for landscape situations
- S. purpurea* 'Streamco' - bred for its intense suckering and spreading growth that promotes erosion control along stream banks or steep naturalized areas, to 10' x 10'

