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Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas

Swearingen, J., K. Reshetiloff, B. Slattery, and S. Zwicker. 2002. Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas. National Park Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 82 pp.



Randy Baldwin

Princess Tree

Paulownia tomentosa

Origin: Central and Western China

Background

Imported to Europe by the Dutch East India Company in the 1830s and brought to North America soon after. Historical records describe its medicinal, ornamental and timber uses as early as the 3rd century B.C. Its ability to sprout prolifically from adventitious buds on stems and roots allows it to survive fire, cutting and even bulldozing in construction areas. It is prized for carving.

Distribution and Ecological Threat

Princess tree occurs throughout much of the eastern United States from Texas to New England where it can be found growing along roadsides, stream

banks and forest edges. It tolerates infertile and acid soils and drought conditions and adapts to a wide variety of

habitats. Princess tree invades forests, stream banks and some rocky habitats, displacing native plant species.

Description and Biology

- Plant: small to medium sized tree in the figwort family (Scrophulariaceae) that reaches 30 to 60 feet in height; bark is rough, gray-brown and interlaced with shiny, smooth areas; stems are olive to dark brown, hairy and markedly flattened where stems and branches meet.
- Leaves: large, hairy on upper surfaces, broadly oval to heart-shaped and sometimes shallowly three-lobed and in three pairs along the stem.
- Flowers, fruits and seeds: conspicuous upright clusters of showy, pale violet, fragrant flowers open in the spring before the leaves appear; fruit is a brown capsule with four compartments that may contain several thousand tiny winged seeds; fruits mature in the fall and remain on the tree, providing a handy identification aid.
- Spreads: a single tree is capable of producing an estimated twenty million seeds that are easily transported long distances by wind and water and germinate easily in suitable soil; seedlings grow quickly and flower within 8 to 10 years.



James H. Miller

Prevention and Control

Do not plant princess tree. Young plants can be hand-pulled but larger trees need to be cut at ground

level with power or manual saws, preferably prior to seed formation to prevent further spread. Systemic herbicides have also been used to control this plant.

Native Alternatives

serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis* or *arborea*)



Chris Miller, NRCS

redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)



Britt Slattery, USFWS

sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*)



USDA, NRCS

sweetbay magnolia
(*Magnolia virginiana*)



R. Harrison Wiegand

flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*)



Britt Slattery, USFWS

[[Home](#)] [[Contents](#)]



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Last updated on Wednesday, November 05, 2003 at 01:26 PM
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