

Q: I have heard about a 'princess tree' that is supposed to grow quickly and do well here. I heard that it is supposed to grow to roof height in one season. True?

A: The tree you are describing, *Paulownia tomentosa* is also known as the Princess tree, Empress Tree and Royal Paulownia. It came originally from China, arriving in Europe in the 1830s and in the United States by the 1840's. It has become naturalized in the Southern US, and has been planted across the country.

This tree can grow as tall as 40+ feet with an equal spread, with rough gray-brown bark. Large, light green, cordate, (heart-shaped), leaves look almost tropical, and are slightly tomentose (hairy) on the underside, casting deep shade beneath the canopy. The heavy branches grow horizontally from the trunk.

Large, fragrant clusters of lavender blossoms bloom in the spring, followed by brown fruiting capsules that can persist for months.

Paulownia is a rapid grower, reproducing quickly from seed and root cuttings. The tree likes regular watering, full sun, and if the growing conditions are right, it can grow as rapidly as 2 meters in one year. The roots grow out horizontally and are shallow, making planting beneath the tree very difficult. If you choose to plant one in your garden, take this under advisement, as most of us anticipate adding more plants to our gardens. This plant is used to stabilize abandoned mines in areas that get summer rain.

Q: Are rockroses roses?

A: Rockrose is the common name for a group of evergreen low shrubs that are native to the Mediterranean region. The common name refers to the fact that the flowers resemble the blossoms of wild roses, but they are not in the same family. Cistus shrubs are part of the Cistaceae family where roses are part of the Rosaceae family of plants. Cistus plants like fairly arid conditions, great drainage, and full sun. They will thrive in lean, alkaline soils, and do very well in this climate. Roses need very different levels of care depending upon the variety chosen.