

TREES OF MERIT

Chinese Flame Tree - *Koelreuteria binnata*



In parts of the country that lack the beautiful displays of fall color foliage, *Koelreuteria bipinnata* (Chinese Flame-Tree) is an attractive option. This medium sized shade tree actually provides two color displays, one - very showy, abundant, and fragrant yellow flowers that cover the entire canopy during summer, and two – pink to rust colored papery seed pod husks that replace the flowers in the fall. The seed pods resemble Chinese lanterns and

when dried are used as an attractive compliment in floral arrangements. Even the leaves provide for color, emerging as pinkish bronze to purple in the spring, bright green in the summer, and in some parts of the country, provide beautiful yellow fall foliage.

Native to China and other parts of Asia, the Chinese Flame-Tree has been used successfully throughout the temperate areas of the South and both coasts of the United States. Often confused with *Koelreuteria paniculata*, the Chinese Flame-Tree has more upright branches and twice compounds leaves as opposed to the pinnate compound leaves of its counterpart.

In its native China, the Chinese flame-tree is known as Luan. The flowers are used as a yellow dye and in traditional medicine, and the tree is often planted over the graves of scholars. Western “discovery” of this species is credited to Pierre d'Incarville a Jesuit missionary, who collected the seed and sent it to Russian Erich Laxmann. Laxmann classified the species, naming it for Joseph Koelreuter, a professor of natural history at Karlsruhe. By 1753, the tree was being grown in many places in Europe, reaching the United States in 1811.

In areas that where Chinese-flame trees have been planted, it demonstrate the ability to grow, and provide shade, in a variety of soil and planter types. Although preferring well drained soil, it also grows well in clay soils and is used successfully in a variety of planting applications including medium sized (4-6ft wide) tree lawns, park space, and parking lots. Its well behaved, deep roots, are generally are not an issue for planting near hardscape. The tree grows in USDA hardiness zones 7-10a and does best under moderate water conditions, but is also highly drought tolerant once established.

Growing to a mature height of 40-60 feet The Chinese Flame-Tree's majestic rounded but irregular canopy creates a welcoming shade spot when used in park settings. With its two displays of color, the Chinese Flame-tree is also deservedly used as focal points in landscaping and specimen tree selection.

To obtain the greatest benefits from your Chinese Flame-Tree, pruning and training is essential. Spacing the main branches apart along the central trunk, along with pruning and training branches to grow up and out will help to achieve optimal ground clearance and promote a larger shade footprint. The tree should be planted in full sun to encourage full canopy formation. Care should be taken when planting in open spaces as the seeds do germinate readily and in some areas have been described as problematic due to their proliferation. The species is not listed as invasive, however the state of Florida does list it as potentially invasive. Even with that listing, the Chinese Flame-tree is an important component of the street tree palette in many southern Florida cities. There are no known pests or diseases of major concern, in fact, once established the tree is very hardy and requires little maintenance. The Chinese-flame tree is also highly tolerant of air pollutants and is excellent at absorbing smog, dust, and other particulate matter.

The biggest mystery to the Chinese-flame tree is why its use isn't more widespread. Displays of unique color (being one of the few yellow flowering trees), and being the perfect tree to nap under in the hot summer sun, combined with being very hardy once established make this tree very attractive in a variety of planting situations. The fragrant flower petals that fall to the ground throughout the summer, create a beautiful golden carpet and only add to the character of this tree. Whether used as a street tree, patio tree, park tree, or specimen, owners of Chinese Flame-trees can be sure that this tree will be sure to get compliments on this eye-catching tree throughout the year.

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