



Chilopsis linearis Desert-Willow¹

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INTRODUCTION

This native North American tree is well-known in hot, dry areas where the soft, willow-like leaves and beautiful blooms are a welcome relief (Fig. 1). Desert-Willow reaches 30 feet in height and a width of 25 feet, with fairly loose, open branching. The narrow leaves are five to 12 inches long and, although deciduous, provide no appreciable fall color change.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Chilopsis linearis*

Pronunciation: kye-LOP-sis lin-ee-AIR-iss

Common name(s): Desert-Willow

Family: *Bignoniaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; specimen

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION

Height: 20 to 30 feet

Spread: 15 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: round; spreading

Crown density: open

Growth rate: medium

Texture: fine

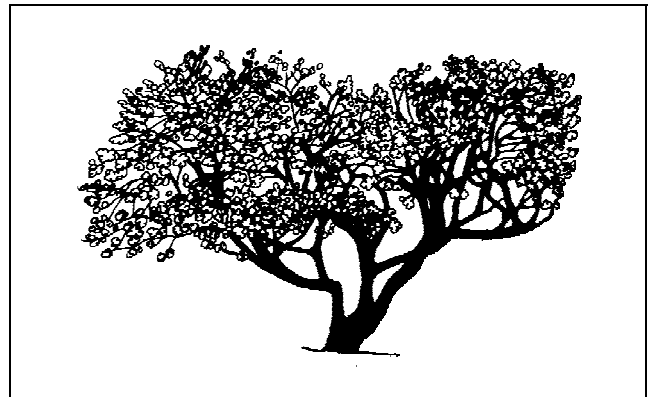


Figure 1. Mature Desert-Willow.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate; opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: lanceolate; linear

Leaf venation: parallel; pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches; 4 to 8 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: lavender; pink; white

Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; showy; summer flowering

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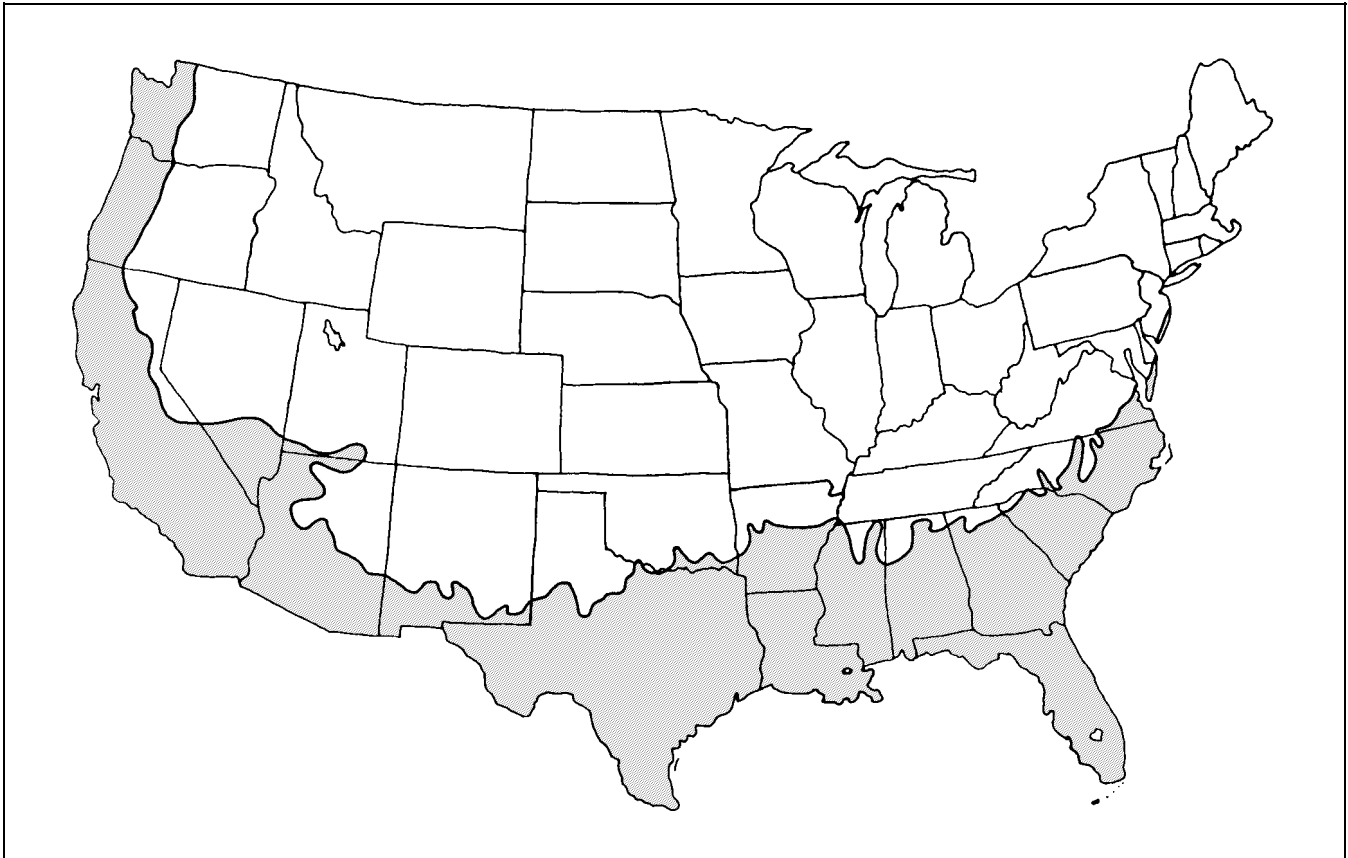


Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Fruit

- Fruit shape:** elongated
- Fruit length:** 6 to 12 inches; 3 to 6 inches
- Fruit covering:** dry or hard
- Fruit color:** brown; tan
- Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

- Trunk/bark/branches:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns
- Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure
- Breakage:** resistant
- Current year twig color:** green
- Current year twig thickness:** thin

Culture

- Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun
- Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
- Drought tolerance:** high

Other

- Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem
- Winter interest:** no special winter interest
- Outstanding tree:** tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
- Invasive potential:** seeds itself into the landscape
- Pest resistance:** no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Unlike the weak wood of true willows, the wood of Desert-Willow was used by Indians to craft their hunting bows. The wood has also been used for fence posts, and baskets are often woven from the twigs. It is the blossoms of Desert-Willow which help make it so special, though, the showy, two to four-inch-long clusters of 1 to 1.5-inch-long, trumpet-shaped blooms

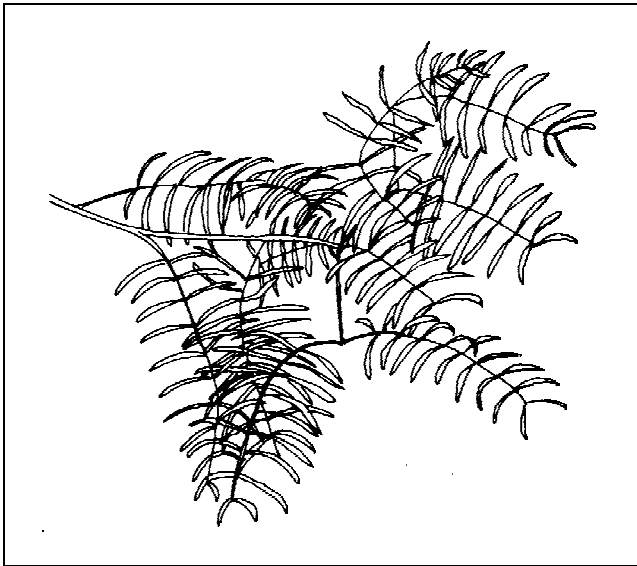


Figure 3. Foliage of Desert-Willow.

appearing from late spring to early fall, or only during the summer if rainfall is sparse. The blooms occur at the tips of the branches and on new growth. The extremely fragrant, orchid-like blooms are most often seen in shades of lavender and pink but a white variety is occasionally found. The bees find the blossoms irresistible and a delightful honey is produced from the flowers. The narrow, four to 12-inch-long seed capsules which follow persist on the tree, and the seeds are quite popular with birds.

The multi-trunked, well branched habit of growth and thick growth make Desert-Willow well suited for a wide screen or tall hedge. Groups can be planted in a large-scale landscape for a splash of color. The tree has also been popular in residential plantings as specimens.

Desert-Willow should be grown in full sun and is extremely drought-tolerant. While the trees will grow better with adequate moisture, they will not tolerate overwatering.

Cultivars include 'Dark Storm' with burgundy flowers and 'Pink Star' with bright pink flowers.

Propagation is done easily by cuttings.

Pests

No pests are of major concern.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.