



Katsuratree, *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*

Alex X. Niemiera, Professor, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech

Summary

Foliage: About 3 inches long; opposite to sub-opposite; deciduous

Height: About 50 feet

Spread: About 30 feet (variable depending on tree shape)

Shape: Varies from a broad-spreading round form to an upright pyramidal form

Main Features

Katsuratree is a magnificent medium to large shade tree. Its accolade-deserving qualities are its form, beautiful foliage, and bark. Seedling-grown trees have a variable form ranging from upright oval to pyramidal to wide spreading. This species has a tendency to develop major branches near ground level, and if one has ample space, such low slung trunks give the lower portion of the tree a majestic “octopus-like” appearance. Nursery-grown trees are often single-trunked plants. Leaves are bluish-green in the growing season. In autumn, leaves turn a beautiful rich yellow, and upon the first frost will emit a cotton candy-like fragrance; visiting a katsuratree on a cold fall morning and smelling this wonderfully sweet fragrance is a distinctly enchanting event. Some cultivars, e.g., ‘Raspberry’ and ‘Strawberry’, are claimed to have a reddish or pinkish spring and fall foliage color; these cultivars are mostly available via mail order nurseries. With age, katsuratrees develop an attractive shaggy gray bark; the bark may only be attractive to those who are initiated in the “tree bark appreciation” sect. This species is not suitable to dry sites since it languishes in soils without ample moisture.

Plant Needs

Zone: 4 to 8

Light: Full sun

Moisture: Average to somewhat moist

Soil type: Average

pH range: Acid to somewhat alkaline

Functions

Katsuratree serves as a medium to large shade tree. Its attractiveness warrants its use as a specimen tree (has sufficient attributes to serve as a focal point in the landscape).

Care

Due to its vigor in youth (medium to fast growing depending on growing conditions), the species will need to be pruned to develop a proper branch structure. Other than this pruning requirement, katsuratree is a relatively low maintenance species with very few pest problems. This species has a reputation for being difficult to transplant.

Additional Information

There are a few cultivars of katsuratree in the trade. In addition to cultivars mentioned in the main features section, there is a dwarf clone ('Herronswood Globe') and weeping clones ('Amazing Grace' and 'Pendulum').

