

Desert Willow

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Description

Desert willow is a small tree native to dry streambeds of the southwestern United States. It reaches heights of 15 to 30 feet with spreads of 15 to 25 feet, and it can be grown as a large shrub or tree with single or multiple trunks. The bright green, willow-like leaves are 4 to 8 inches long and ¼ inch wide. The graceful branch structure and foliage creates a delicate, airy texture in summer and winter. The willow-like leaf shape accounts for the name “desert willow.” However, its spectacular, orchid-like flowers reveal that it is actually a member of the Catalpa family.

The flowers of desert willow appear as early as May and can continue until fall. Flowers are formed on new growth, so each new growth flush results in a new crop of flowers.

Natural populations of desert willow have flower color that ranges from pure white to deep burgundy.



Cultural Requirements

The most important requirement for desert willow is a well-drained soil. Watering is required for establishment, and applying fertilizer during establishment is also beneficial. Once established, additional water is not required for survival, but occasional watering during the summer months will produce a flush of growth and more profuse flowering. It is best however not to add supplemental water to plants in the fall and winter when the plants are leafless.

Desert willow prefers sunny, droughty sites and is recommended for courtyards, patios and west facing exposures. It is not recommended for planting in lawns.

Tip dieback is typical and not a cause for concern. For a plant with a well-groomed look, simply prune out any dead twigs or branches after leaf-out in the spring.

Propagation

Desert willow may be propagated from seed, hardwood cuttings (dormant) or softwood cuttings (mid-summer). Propagation from cuttings is the only way to produce plants with the same flower color as the parent plant. Plants produced from seed have random flower color.

Desert Willow

Chilopsis linearis (Cav.) Sweet

Landscape Uses: Specimen tree or background planting

Characteristics: 15-30 ft. tall

15-25 ft. spread

Bright green leaves

Showy white to burgundy orchid-like flowers that attract hummingbirds

Hardiness: USDA zones 6-7

Elevation 3,000 to 6,000 ft.

Precipitation 8-14 in. annually

Soil Adaptation: Tolerates any well-drained soil

Cultivars: ‘Barranco’, ‘Burgundy’, ‘Dark Storm’, ‘Hope’, ‘Lois Adams’, ‘LucretiaHamilton’, ‘Regal’

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