

Mimosa

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Mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*), also known as silk tree, pink acacia or silky acacia, is an ornamental tree that was introduced to England in 1745 from Persia and China. Andre Michaux introduced the tree into the United States at the end of the eighteenth century. The mimosa quickly adapted to this country and now grows wild in the eastern United States.

This tree is small to size and is in the pea family (*Fabaceae*). The mimosa can grow up to 20 to 40 feet tall. It is broad spreading with a rounded, mushroom crown. Growth rate is fast, three feet or more per year is not unusual. The bark is light brown, nearly smooth, and generally thin with lens shaped areas along the stem. Leaves on the mimosa are fern-like and finely divided, 5-8 inches long by about 3-4 inches wide, and alternate along the stems.

The beautiful pom-pom like showy flowers are about 1-1/2 inches long and can range in color from almost white to bright deep pink. They are arranged in panicles on the end of the branch. Flowering is profuse in late May and June and occurs sporadically on various trees throughout July and August. Each year during the summer, Alabama's roadways are painted with the beautiful display of the flowering mimosa.

Fruits are flat, straw-colored pods



about 6 inches long containing light brown oval-shaped seeds about 1/2 inch in length. Pods ripen in August to September and begin to disintegrate soon after, but remain on the trees into winter. Mimosa reproduces both vegetatively and by seed. Its seeds have impermeable seed coats that allow them to remain dormant for many years. One study showed that 90 percent of the seeds were viable after five years and, for another species of mimosa, a third of its seeds germinated after 50 years in open storage. Seeds are mostly dispersed below or around the

parent plant, but can be dispersed further by water. Mimosa grows rapidly under good conditions but is short-lived and has weak, brittle wood.

Mimosa takes advantage of disturbed areas, often spreading by seed from nearby ornamentals or from contaminated fill dirt. It prefers full sun and is often seen along roadsides and open vacant lots. The mimosa can tolerate partial shade but is seldom found in forests with full canopy cover, or at high elevations (above 3,000 ft.) It is capable of growing in a wide range of soil conditions. Mimosa is a producer of large seed crops and it will re-sprout when damaged. This tree is a strong competitor to native trees and shrubs in open areas or forest edges. Dense stands of mimosa severely reduce the sunlight and nutrients available for other plants.

The tree has no economic value as a forest tree but is used as an ornamental because of its flowers. Some species are used for bonsai and it is a favorite with children as a climbing tree.

The Alabama State Champion Mimosa is located in Tuscaloosa County. Its circumference is 145 inches, it stands 55 ft. tall, and it has a crown spread of 78 ft. for a total point value of 219.5. The National Champion is located in Orlando, Florida. This tree has a circumference of 179 inches, it is 56 ft. tall, and has a crown spread of 74 ft. Its total point value is 254. 



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