

Mimosa

Albizia julibrissin

The Mimosa tree is in the Pea family (Fabaceae). It's a silk tree also called silky acacia. Sometimes called the Persian silk tree. The Persian name means "night sleeper" and in Japan it is known as the sleeping tree. That is because the bipinnate leaves fold up at night and during rainstorms. Bipinnate simply means that instead of having undivided leaves, the leaves are separated like those of a fern or a palm frond. The Silk tree was introduced to the United States in 1745 for use as an ornamental plant. Silk tree occurs from California across the southern United States to New York. It grows in disturbed areas such as roadsides, forest edges and various open habitats. It is a hardy plant that tolerates a variety of soil and moisture conditions, enhanced by the ability of its roots to produce nitrogen.

The trees grow vigorously and displace native trees and shrubs, spreading by seed and vegetative means. Once established, silk tree is difficult to remove due to its long lived seeds and its ability to re-sprout vigorously.

The Mimosa is a small deciduous tree that grows 10 to 50 feet in height and often has multiple trunks. The bark is light brown, nearly smooth, thin and has lens-shaped spots along the stem. The leaves alternate, twice-pinnately compound, fern-like. The flowers are pink, fragrant and look like pom-poms. Flowering occurs in early summer; fruits are flat 6 inch long seedpods that develop in the late summer. Mimosa seeds have impermeable seed coats that allow them to remain dormant for years.

Traditional Chinese medicinal practitioners have long revered the bark, leaves and flowers of the Mimosa tree for its potent health benefits. The Mayan people of Central America also revered the plant, and commonly used it for aiding trauma injuries and burns. Usually, for health applications, the bark of the tree is shaved and dried and used in tincture and capsule forms. The leaves of the plant can also be dried and used as a tea. One of the most important applications of the dried/powder form of the bark is its use as an ancient mood enhancer. Known in China as the "Collective Happiness Bark," the Mimosa tree was given to people who needed a "spiritual uplift or cleansing." Similarly, the bark is used to cleanse the heart and liver meridians (energetic pathways) in the body. Mimosa tree bark is also used as a common remedy for generalized muscular discomfort and swelling.

The Mimosa plant proved to be a key remedy for over 5,000 burn victims in the San Juanico Disaster of 1984. After a petroleum gas explosion occurred in Mexico, officials turned to this plant as a healing salve for the wounded.

You can find these trees buried around the Sexton's home at the Salt Lake City Cemetery.

