

Plantline

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A Newsletter from Carlton Plants LLC

AN APPRECIATION OF PARROTIA PERSICA

By Joe Dixon

There are not very many trees found in our nursery industries that are held in as high esteem as is *Parrotia persica*. This tree is also known as Persian Parrotia or Persian Ironwood. It is native to the Alborz mountainous region of Iran. It was first collected and described around 1830 and was named after the German born naturalist FW Parrot.

It remains one of the least known and appreciated shade trees being grown and offered by nurseries today but is quickly gaining popularity as city foresters and landscape designers become increasingly familiar with its many wonderful attributes. In doing research for this article the



one thing that stood out was the high regard that horticultural writers have for this tree. Having a specimen in my own yard, to appreciate through the seasons, puts me in total agreement with all of the superlatives that are written about *Parrotia persica*. It was honored in 2007 by the International Dendrology Society as tree of the year.

Parrotia persica grown from a seedling can vary widely regarding its mature form and ultimate size. Typical specimens will reach anywhere from 20 to 40 foot tall by 15 to 30 foot wide. There is a



magnificent mature specimen at the Elk Rock Gardens of Bishop's Close near Portland, Oregon that is much wider than it is tall. If a designer for a project is looking to plant a grouping or boulevard with *Parrotia* of consistent size and form there are clonal selections available to choose from.



"Thought is the blossom, language the bud, and action the fruit behind it."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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But first I should highlight the attributes that make this tree such a desirable one to use in our modern landscapes.

- It is very disease and insect free in most areas.
- It produces an extraordinary rainbow display of fall colors that include yellows, oranges, reds, purples and mixed variations of all. From year to year the fall color display can vary so we look forward to being surprised with striking variations every autumn.
- The fall color display is long slow and gradual and can last for weeks prior to final leaf drop.
- The branching structure tends to be layered and very elegant with very glossy rich green foliage in the summer.
- With age the bark begins to exfoliate similar to a sycamore except it reveals various shaped silvery blotches of tans, browns and grays for a striking multi-colored effect.

This now brings us to a clonal selection that can be planted for its consistent upright growth: **Parrotia persica 'Ruby Vase' (cultivar 'Inge')**

'Ruby Vase' is a variety selected and registered with COPF in 2001 by Sandy Howkins at Specimen Trees in Pitt Meadows, BC Canada. It has an upright vase shaped habit that is symmetrical and well balanced.

The average mature height is 30 feet with a spread of 12 feet.

The new growth emerges with a lovely rich burgundy color and holds tints of red in the foliage throughout the summer. Fall color varies like the species.

It has a Zone 4 hardiness rating

Overall 'Ruby Vase' exceeds or is on a par with the best fall coloring, pest free, upright growing tree varieties currently available in our industry. There are not too many varieties that do fit this ideal combination of attributes so 'Ruby Vase' is a very welcome addition to that very select list for planting as a beautiful, colorful, low maintenance tree in our urban landscapes.

Carlton offers both Parrotia persica and Parrotia persica 'Ruby Vase' in both tree and multi-stem forms.

