



# NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

## Meet the Jacaranda Tree (February 15, 2025)

By Cathy Ronk, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

The jacaranda tree is a stunning landscape tree with an impressive display of pretty purple flowers and delicate fern-like leaves. Flattened, mahogany-colored seed pods follow that are prized for their decorative qualities. *Jacaranda mimosifolia* is a sub-tropical tree native to Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia but is now a popular tree in Florida, Hawaii, Arizona, Texas, and California. Black poui, blue jacaranda, green ebony, and fern tree are additional common names.



### Interesting Facts:

- The species name "*mimosifolia*" means leaves like a mimosa. (Silk tree and mimosa tree are two of the common names for another tree: *Albizia julibrissin*.)
- There are such a large number of jacaranda trees in Pretoria, South Africa, that it is popularly known as "Jacaranda City."
- In 2012, the jacaranda tree was the recipient of the prestigious **Award of Garden Merit** by the UK's Royal Horticultural Society with their hardiness rating of "warm temperate=heated greenhouse."
- Horticulturist Kate Sessions (1857-1940) imported the jacaranda tree to California and is credited with popularizing the tree. She is known as the "Mother of Balboa Park."
- Vibrant purple blooms cover the jacaranda tree's bare branches before the new ferny leaves appear. The flowers attract hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies.

### Description:

The jacaranda is a deciduous or semi-evergreen tree. Most garden books indicate that the jacaranda tree cannot grow in our climate due to winter frost. Ornamental horticulture students were taught this as well. However, with our warmer winters and with some attentive care of young jacarandas, it is quite possible to grow them in our valley.

With a moderate growth rate, it grows 25-40 feet tall and 15-30 feet wide and has an upright branch growth with an open, rounded habit. It is usually deciduous in our area, meaning it drops all of its leaves in one season. Most jacarandas are single-trunked, but some are grown with multi-trunks.

The foliage of bright green, fern-like, compound leaves, up to 20 inches long, turns brown in fall and usually drops in late winter. The tubular, 2-inch-long purple flowers grow in profuse clusters (panicles) and can reach 8 inches in length. They appear in spring and last about 3 weeks before falling but hold their color to create a carpet of purple under the tree. Insufficient heat can prevent flowering.

After flowering, flattened, oval-shaped, brown seed capsules appear. These 2-3 inch long seed pods open up like clam shells to reveal winged seeds in papery casings.

The smooth gray-brown bark of young trees becomes finely scaly with age. The pale wood is smooth and straight-grained. It is used in carpentry, for carving, and for making tool handles.

The *Jacaranda mimosifolia* 'Alba' or 'White Christmas' is a cultivar with white flowers, very lush foliage, and less bloom but over a longer season. *Jacaranda mimosifolia* 'Bonsai Blue' is a fast-growing, true dwarf that may reach 10-12 feet tall and 6-8 feet wide.

### Care:

Young trees are tender below 25 degrees Fahrenheit but often rebound. Trees gain hardiness with maturity, so they can withstand some cold weather days. Plant between fall and early spring in full sun. Be sure to plant at least 15 feet away from any buildings, and do not plant under power lines.

Jacarandas tolerate a variety of soils but prefer sandy, moderately fertile, well-drained soils. Because jacarandas are considered a bit messy with bloom, leaf, and seed pod litter, they can cause fall clean-up of patios, driveways, pools, and lawns.

The Water Use Classification of Landscape Species (WUCOLS) rates the jacaranda as a "moderate water use" tree in our valley. The WUCOLS project was initiated and funded by the Water Use Efficiency Office of the California Department of Water Resources

(DWR). Work was directed by the University of California Cooperative Extension. WUCOLS provides evaluations of the irrigation needs of over 3,500 plant groups used in California landscapes at [www.ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS](http://www.ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS). New jacaranda trees must be regularly watered but will become drought-tolerant once established. Over-watered trees can develop root rot.

Prune young trees for structure and form. (Helpful tips on how to train young trees are available on our Master Gardener website, <http://cetulare.ucanr.edu>.) Mature jacaranda trees require little pruning, usually only to remove dead, damaged, or crossing branches in winter.

This tree resists oak root fungus. Generally pest-free, it can experience aphids.

**Design Tips:**

Jacaranda is suitable for medium to large yards. With its intensely beautiful blossoms, this noteworthy tree makes a great focal point in the garden. It is also a good shade tree with an open canopy that provides filtered shade for under-plantings that need only partial shade.

The uniquely shaped seed pods are used in crafts and in floral design.

**Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:**

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