

# Paulownia Trees for the Small Farm

## *History*

The Paulownia tree is a non native tree that has been found in the most unlikely places around Delmarva. Originally from China, it is believed to have migrated to this country in the holds of sailing ships. Early settlers brought fine dishes from China, which was packed in Paulownia seed pods. The pods were very light but were good packing material preventing valuables from damage. The seeds from the discard-

ed pods soon were seen around local seaports such as New Castle, Delaware, and soon the wind and animals carried the seeds around our region.

The Paulownia seed needs daylight to germinate, so we normally don't see Paulownia trees in the middle of forests; rather on the edges of forests, railroad rights-of-way, and even in the cracks of sidewalks.

## *Benefits*

Paulownia wood is highly sought after in the foreign market, and is also becoming increasingly popular in the domestic market. The Chinese and Japanese find many uses for the light but strong wood. It is a favorite of carvers. It peels easily and makes beautiful veneer stock.

Although considered a hardwood by definition, it easily takes stain and is easy to finish. Extremely strong for its light weight, it is even fire resistant, which makes it a good choice for boat builders. The main problem is that it is extremely scarce, which makes it expensive to buy.

## *Climate*

Paulownia is well suited for the local climate. Research shows that the slower the tree grows, the better the log quality. Since our area has a moderate winter, Paulownia logs are usually of a higher quality than ones grown in the South.

Top grade Paulownia logs have four rings or more per inch across the butt of the saw log. A typical Paulownia tree can produce a top quality saw log in about 20 years, compared to a similar size walnut

log, which will take over 60 years to produce. Central Pennsylvania and eastern New York comprise the Northern limit for successful Paulownia production, although there are Paulownia trees farther north in protected areas. A 12-foot Paulownia saw log can bring ten times as much as Oak or Poplar. It should be noted that the lumber market is subject to wide fluctuations.



Six month-old Paulownia tree



1 year-old Paulownia tree



Five year-old Paulownia Plantation

photo courtesy of paulowniatrees.org

Get as much information as possible before you decide to start this new venture. There are many informative web sites that have valuable information. The most important thing to remember is to START SMALL. Most people would be better off starting with 200-300 trees at

first. Since the Paulownia tree really wants to be a bush, it is very lazy. It cannot tolerate weed competition, and needs constant watering to live.

Once they become established, they need pruning on a regular basis in order to achieve tall growth.

## Planting Options

Planting can be from root cuttings or seedlings. Seedlings are a lot like tomato plants, but require much more delicate care. Seeds can be started in a greenhouse in early January, and should be transplanted after the danger of frost has passed. Root stock should be planted at a depth of one inch or less and watered frequently until emergence. Irrigation is necessary during the first two years. First year plants also need staking, as they are quite brittle and susceptible to wind damage. Weeds must be carefully hoed, as a power string trimmer can easily damage the Paulownia trunk. In the second year and thereafter, Roundup™ is the best weed control around the young tree.

For more information contact:

American Paulownia Association  
[www.paulowniatrees.org](http://www.paulowniatrees.org)

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