



Royal paulownia or Empress tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*)

Paulownia is easily visible right now as its bright purple, pendulous flowers catch the eye even at highway speeds. It is originally from China where it has been used for thousands of years for its medicinal properties and for timber. Paulownia was first brought to the United States in the mid 1800's as a landscape plant and has since escaped, aggressively taking over streamsides, roadsides, and forest edges. The tree was then heavily planted in plantations as the word spread that the wood was extremely valuable in Japan for ornamental carving pieces such as jewelry and dowry boxes. Urban legends spread like wildfire as stories of trees cut down and stolen during the night became rampant. Should you happen to have a paulownia on your property, tree bandits would offer to cut down that "annoying" or "dangerous" tree for free just to profit from the wood. The trend soon died as it was discovered that the trees grew too quickly here, thus making the wood less desirable.

To identify Paulownia, look for its large, heart-shaped leaves that are opposite and typically downy. Stems are stout, heavy with lenticels (wart-like protrusions that allow for gas exchange) and flattened at the nodes (where the leaves emerge). In the fall, look for the seed capsules that contain thousands of seeds each and for flower buds that are velvety brown. Flowers are fragrant, purple clusters in the spring. Be careful not to confuse this plant with the native Catalpa, which will typically have three leaves at each node on the stem and long, cigar-like fruit.

To control Paulownia, young seedlings can be hand pulled. This is best done when the ground is wet. Older trees can be cut down or girdled with the expectation of resprouts. These resprouts can be cut again or sprayed with herbicide. Replant with native trees and shrubs such as eastern redbud, dogwood, spicebush, or sassafras.

See <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/pato1.htm> for more information.

Also blooming right now with white, fragrant, pendulous flowers is black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*). Part of the pea family, it can grow on disturbed, non-fertile soils. Native to western Maryland, it's more of a colonizing weed in these parts.