

# Unusual Ornamental Trees That Can be Found Growing in The British Isles

## (1) The Foxglove Tree (*Paulownia tormentosa*)



Following the recent trend to milder winters, many trees that would normally have only been seen growing in Southern Europe, or perhaps the Scilly Isles and other areas of the British Isles favoured with a mild climate, can now be seen in Southern and Midland counties of England and even on occasions further north.

One such tree is the Foxglove Tree, so named because of its prolific blue flowers in early spring which bear a striking resemblance to the Foxglove. A downside to growing the Foxglove Tree in this country is that flower buds are developed in late summer and mature in early autumn, which in the event of a severe winter the buds would be killed and therefore no spring floral display although the tree itself can withstand quite low temperatures. However, this shouldn't be a deterrent to planting such a magnificent tree.



The Foxglove Tree is sometimes grown as a shrub, being cut back each year to encourage the production of very large ornamental leaves on the shoots as they elongate in the spring.

The leaves are large heart shaped and the flowers are large and showy ranging in colour from lavender blue to almost white depending on variety and soil type. The fruit is a large capsule with winged seeds which remain on the tree into winter. They prefer rich loam and a protected situation. Propagation is by seed, cuttings or by rooting leaves when they are 1 inch long.

The Foxglove Tree is native to China. According to legends and records, dating back 2600 years, people in ancient times used Paulownia Trees for various purposes. In the work Zhung Tze, it is recorded "Phoenix flew from the south sea to the north sea without perching on trees other than Paulownia and without eating anything but bamboo fruit".

The Chinese have been planting Paulownia Trees for many centuries around their dwellings in order to bring good luck and to attract the Phoenix.

Because Foxglove Trees are not only very fast growing but produce high quality lumber (1 cubic metre within 10 years) and are therefore being planted commercially for timber production particularly in Australia. Foxglove Tree wood is light in weight and colour, yet it is strong, dries easily, has a beautiful grain, does not warp, crack or deform easily. The wood is easy to work with and suitable for the manufacture of furniture, plywood, mouldings, doors and many other uses. The leaves and flowers are rich in nitrogen and therefore serve as good fertiliser and fodder.

Instead of just growing forests only or food crops only, you can plant your food crops amongst your forests. Over the last 30 years in China, where more than 3 million hectares of Foxglove Trees have been intercropped with food crops (wheat, soya, and other cereals) increased yields have been consistently recorded.

The flowers are colourful and beautiful in spring and the trees are green and shady in summer. Foxglove Tree species are therefore very suitable for beautifying and enriching the environment. They are also equally suitable for landscaping of urban and industrial areas.

Foxglove Trees can adapt to a wide range of temperatures. All species in Australia are known to withstand temperatures of -10° to +40° centigrade. The non-ornamental species of Foxglove Tree *Paulownia elongata* is used down under for commercial crops.