

Chinese Elm By Larry Figart

First, a little history lesson. The American Elm, *Ulmus americana*, was at one time the dominant street tree in the United States. In 1928 Asian elm beetles escaped into the U.S. from a shipment of logs bound for Chicago to be used to make furniture. The beetles carried with them a fungus that causes Dutch Elm disease. The disease rapidly spread throughout the N.E. United States wiping out entire neighborhoods of American Elm in the process.



Lacebark Elm Bark

What does all this have to do with Chinese Elms? As our native elms are dying off, a resistant replacement is being sought. Chinese elms have been around for a long time, but they are now getting a lot of new attention.

Chinese elms are native to China, Korea, and Japan.

They were introduced in the U.S. in the mid 1800's and are resistant to Dutch Elm Disease.

Chinese elms *Ulmus parvifolia* are also called lacebark elms after their flaky attractive bark. Chinese elm should not be confused with Siberian elm, *Ulmus pumila*. Siberian elms were also thought to be a replacement for American elms, but have proved to be very undesirable because they are short lived, brittle, and somewhat invasive.

Chinese elms are deciduous for the most part. Their branch structure is very typical of elms. It is upright scaffold limbs arching over into a rounded canopy.

Chinese elm will not get to the size of the American elm. According to Dr. Ed Gilman from the University of Florida, "It can reach 80 feet in height, but it is more often seen at 40 to 50 feet".

The most distinguishing feature of Chinese elm is its bark. The bark is naturally flaky revealing inner bark that can be a range of grey, green, orange and brown. This adds winter interest to



'Allee' Lacebark Elm

the landscape even when the foliage is not present.

The tree has small inconspicuous light green flowers that bloom in the late summer to early fall. The fruit is a small flat samara that drops from the tree in the fall, but causes little litter problems.

The tree has been described as an excellent, tough durable tree. However, recent research by Dr. Mary Duryea of the University of Florida suggests that this tree may not be very wind tolerant. This tree withstands urban conditions and will do fine in residential yards, as well as, larger parking lot islands.

The Chinese elm is naturally variable in form so several cultivars have been selected for form, size and cold hardiness. Some of the more common cultivars are as follows:

'Drake'- upright branches, small dark leaves, that hold long into the fall.

'Allee'- Upright branching, drought tolerant, and modest fall color.

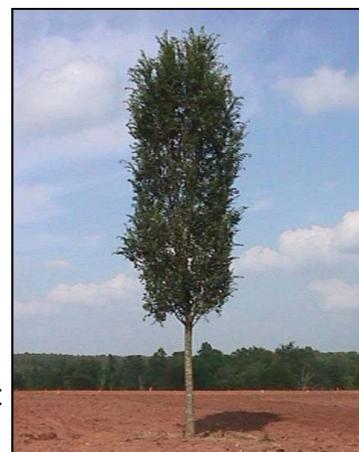
'Bosque' - One central leader with strong ascending branches with a pyramidal shape, excellent heat tolerance.

'Everclear'- This lacebark elm is reportedly a quick grower. It is designed for street scapes in urban areas.

Many nurserymen and landscape architects believe that the use of this tree will increase as more selections become available. The downside to this is that it may become as overused as the American Elm was 60 years ago. A healthy urban forest needs to include a mix of many species and cultivars. The good news is that we still have some room for this tree.



'Bosque' Lacebark Elm



'Everclear' Lacebark Elm