

Butterfly Tree, *khof al gamal*

The Butterfly Tree, or khof al gamal in Arabic, is native to southeast Asia and thrives well in hot, subtropical and tropical climates. It is one of the most desirable of small trees with a fast growth, reaching a maximum height of 6 to 10 metres, and a similar width. There are many rather isolated occurrences of the tree in Arriyadh, but it will really look its best only in a protected environment with shelter, high relative humidity and frequent irrigation. Foliage remains on the tree in mild winters, to be shed when the extraordinary flowers appear. Cold winters may induce a brief period of dormancy when the twigs become bare. Inflorescences resemble orchids in colours from pink to magenta. They measure some 12 cm across, attract bees and emit a light fragrance. Its fruits are brown pods 30 cm in length, filled with spherical seeds. These easily germinate in sandy soil. The light-green leaves are bi-lobed, like a camel's foot. They sprout soon after flowering begins. Growth habit is an open canopy with arched branches, and Butterfly Trees are often multi-stemmed or grow as a shrub. The plants should not be exposed to wind. Pruning in winter is possible to achieve the desired shape and it is recommended for young plants in particular. Frequent irrigation, sufficient nutrients, good drainage and full sun will ensure a good appearance. It will survive drought, but becomes stunted and will not flower if humidity is too low. Bauhinias are ideal trees in urban areas and pedestrian precincts even in containers.



GENERAL

Origin	: sub-tropical
Vigour	: normal growth rate
Humidity	: semi-arid, very humid, very humid
Propagation	: sowing and pricking out, cuttings
Maintenance	: moderate

CONDITIONS

Urban climate	: resistant
Dessication	: vulnerable
Stagnant water	: vulnerable
Irrigation	: high, medium
Salinity/ppm	: moderate (1500 ppm)
Hardiness	: -3°C

SHAPE

Type	: tree, shrub
Height	: 6 m-10 m
Spread	: 6 m-10 m
Foliage	: evergreen

FLOWER

Colour	: purple
Size	: 12 cm
Period	: October - December
Smell	: scented, flower

FRUIT

Type of fruit	: pod
Fruit size	: 25 cm