

Triplaris surinamensis syn Triplaris weigeltiana – Long John

Triplaris surinamensis, commonly known as Long John, Mulato tree or Antwood is a stunning tropical tree occurring naturally southern Mexico to Central and tropical South America where it is found naturally on low riverbanks or swamps or forming almost pure stands in abandoned clearings.

Growing in time to a height to be a slender, graceful tree of perhaps 30m with a trunk of some 50cm in diameter, this tree gets one of its common names (Long John) from its columnar habit. At 15m in height it is perhaps only some 3m in width - a definite plus for those looking for a spectacular flowering tree for a narrow space or as a vertical feature. This species is also known as Antwood as in its natural environment the trunk develops cracks which become the home for colonies of ants.

Bark is a smooth grey green. The bole is slightly angled or fluted and has low narrow buttresses. Foliage is large and lush with dark green leaves to 15cm in length and 8cm in width. The tree comes in male and female form, the female is by far the more showy with clusters of red to red-pink flowers held in copious clusters for several months at a time and male trees produce white flowers clustered on long thin sprays and would be regarded as quite attractive until seen in comparison with its wife. Fruit is small, brown and nutlike. Seed is three winged and wind-blown, with the three wings acting like a mini helicopter. Propagation is from seed.

Long John is regarded as one of the worlds great flowering trees but unfortunately it is not common and seed is in the hard to get category.

Propagation

Germination is straightforward without the need of pre-treatment other than soaking in warm water overnight although seed needs a temperature of at least 20°C for even rapid germination.

Sow seed in a good quality potting mix to a depth of 2cm. Water in well and maintain the media in a lightly moist state. Place the seed tray or container in a warm light position.

Pot on into a tube or pot with good depth at the second true leaf stage. *Triplaris* develops quite strong roots and a pot depth of at least 20cm is a benefit.

Grow on as desired and plant out after the danger of frost has passed in its permanent position.

This is a tropical tree that is best suited to a tropical or subtropical climate. It likes a position in full sun in a rich, well-drained sandy loam. It has some drought tolerance although is at its best with regular water.