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What is that tree: Chitalpa

In mid-late summer customers always ask, “what is that tree that’s blooming now with the big flowers”? That tree is *x Chitalpa tashkentensis* – a cross between *Catalpa bignonioides* (Common Catalpa) and *Chilopsis linearis* (Desert Willow).

Chitalpas owe their beauty and hardiness to both parent species.

Catalpas are native to the east and southeast but adapt well to heat, cold and Western soils. They bear large, heart-shaped leaves and 2-inch wide trumpet-shaped flowers that appear in late spring and summer. The flowers are followed by long, bean-shaped seed pods which are sometimes called “Indian beans”.

Catalpa bignonioides is a mid-size tree, growing to 30 – 40’ with a similar spread that bears 5 – 8 inch long leaves.

Chilopsis linearis is a desert native that grows in dry washes and streambeds below 5,000 feet. Its range extends from California to Texas and south to Mexico. It grows rapidly (as much as 3 feet a season) to reach a mature height ranging from 15 – 30’ tall and 10 – 20’ wide. As it ages it develops shaggy bark and attractively twisted trunks.

Desert Willow bears fragrant trumpet-shaped flowers that range in color from reddish purple, lavender, rose, pink or white. The flowers are attractive to hummingbirds. As with Catalpas, flowers are followed by long, bean-shaped seed pods.

The name “Desert Willow” is derived from its long, narrow willow-like leaves and because it grows in similar habitat as native willows.

Desert Willows have been bred for specific flower colors. ‘Burgundy’ bears deep purplish red flowers while ‘Timeless Beauty’ bears two-toned burgundy and lavender flowers. ‘Timeless Beauty’ is a seedless variety and a long bloomer with flowers appearing spring through summer.

The cross of *Catalpa bignonioides* and *Chilopsis linearis*, *x Chitalpa tashkentensis* commonly known as Chitalpa, is a fast growing tree that reaches 20 – 30’ tall. It displays the larger flowers of the Catalpa but retains

the desert hardiness of the Desert Willow. Chitalpas are tolerant of alkaline soil and drought so be careful not to over-water once established.

Chitalpa leaves are 4 -5" long and 1" wide – slightly wider than the leaves of the Desert Willow. The flowers are frilly and trumpet-shaped and are borne late spring through fall.

Chitalpa 'Pink Dawn' bears pale lavender flowers with pale yellow throats and 'Morning Cloud' bears white flowers with purple throats.

Chitalpa is an excellent example of heat-tolerant and water-wise plant that offers showy, colorful flowers. Its smaller size means it can be accommodated even in small yards. What's not to like about this attractive but tough flowering tree?