

Hovenia dulcis - Growing Guide

Growing Hovenia Dulcis

Raisin Tree

This is a rare and not often recognised deciduous tree growing here to around 20ft and counting. It is an upright spreading tree which is actually quite easily identifiable by its large alternate heart shaped leaves. These are toothed and glossy with downy undersides. They can be 6-8in in length.

The tree is fully hardy and is found in forests and woodland in SE Asia. It should be grown in full sun with shelter from cold north or east winds as its unripened wood is prone to frost damage and some dieback. Although the tree will recover from this and regrow perfectly well thought is needed as to the best location because it is a tree admired for its fragrant flowers and fruits.

In summer *H. dulcis* bears forked cymes of tiny greenish yellow flowers at the ends of terminal and axillary branches. After flowering the flower stalks swell up and become red and fleshy. They are sweet and edible as are the following spherical black fruits. The plant is cultivated in Japan and China for this purpose and hence its common name as the raisin tree or Japanese raisin tree.

Several of us were recently stumped at Borde Hill Gardens where we failed identify this mature tree growing (as it should be) in full sun. We got as far as saying mulberry and *Aristotlelia* which were both respectable guesses but incorrect! A lovely fruiting tree when grown in the right location.



Burncoose Nurseries: Gwennap, Redruth, Cornwall TR16 6BJ

Telephone: +44 (0) 1209 860316 Fax: +44 (0) 1209 860011 Email: info@burncoose.co.uk

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