

Firmiana Growing Guide

Growing Firmiana Simplex

At Ventnor Botanic Gardens in the Isle of Wight this is a spectacular small tree growing to 25ft in full sun and shelter against a wall. This is a tender difficult tree to grow but it is well worth the effort.

F. simplex has smooth green bark and large three or five lobed dark green leaves which turn yellow in autumn. The flowers are yellow on branching upright panicles which can be the 9in wide. In autumn papery fruits split when ripe to reveal the seeds.

We have found that this tree can get cut to the ground after a cold winter but it reshoots vigorously from the base with multiple shoots. Hot summers may well toughen up the tree to withstand more cold but the new shoots on young plants have green fleshy stems and are obviously vulnerable. Once the tree establishes a woody trunk after a few years' growth it becomes much hardier.

F. simplex originates from Vietnam and Japan. In some respects it looks a bit like a *fatsia* in its leaf and flower form. While undoubtedly tender it is a tree which can grow well in Cornish coastal situations or even in south London on a sunny wall. For most people this is really a rare tree for a large conservatory.



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