BURNCOOSE NURSERIES PART OF THE CAERHAYS ESTATE

Pterocarya - Growing Guide

Growing Pterocarya

These are large distinctive trees requiring full sun and plenty of room to develop. They grow from 50 to 80ft with a spread of up to 50ft. They have huge oblong pinnate leaves 15-20in long with 21 or 23 individual glossy dark green leaflets which colour yellow in autumn.

The male and female catkins appear on the same tree. They are green and appear in profusion as the leaves emerge. By July the female catkins have developed into long hanging tassels of winged fruits which are green at first and very prominent on the tree turning brown as they ripen.

P. stenoptera, from China, will develop into a thicket very quickly if you do not cut off the numerous suckers which develop wherever the root system breaks the surface. These are cut off at Wisley every year to ensure that all the energy and growth goes into the main tree. At Caerhays, in full sun and in the teeth of the east wind, we have deliberately allowed these suckers to develop as small surrounding trees. In 27 years we already have a thicket with a central tree and many surrounding competitors. In the wild this tree can quickly colonise a whole hillside. P. stenoptera will produce root suckers in pots in the nursery and this is the easiest way of obtaining and splitting off new plants. The seed are very viable with us and should be sown in the autumn in a cold frame.

P. fraxinifolia originates from the Caucasus. It has 23 leaflets in each leaf (stenoptera has 21). The male catkins are about 5in long and the female ones 12-20in and the long tassels of fruits can be 20in long. This gives the tree a very distinct appearance. Like other species P. fraxinifolia is a greedy tree which thrives in rich soils with plenty of moisture in full sun. We have not observed suckering around the base of this tree at Caerhays. As such it may be more manageable than P. stenoptera.

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