

## **Hornbeam from Japan**

The hornbeams are rugged trees of year-round grace and beauty. Gardeners are most familiar with the 20' to 30' American *Carpinus caroliniana* and 40' to 60' European *C. betulus*. The latter has several fine columnar, globe and weeping cultivars. All the hornbeams are valued for maintaining fresh green leaf color in hot summers, as well as for their odd fruits, which look like papery whirligigs dangling in great clusters.

Recently the Japanese hornbeam, *C. japonica*, has become available from some nurseries. Now this species has received a 2008 Gold Medal Plant Award from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS).

Hardy in zones 4 to 8, this unusual Asian tree has a "fan" habit, its wide-spreading layered branches radiating like fan ribs. In full sun or part shade, it grows no taller than 25', with a maximum spread of 15'. The slender 2" to 4" leaves are beautifully serrated and dark green, turning yellow in fall. Most intriguing, a PHS press release notes, "In spring, Japanese hornbeam is profusely adorned with thumb-sized cone shaped nutlets in shades of cream, tan and green, which turn brown upon maturity and persist into fall."

Andrew Bunting of Scott Arboretum (Swarthmore, PA 19081) reports that this species has proved to be a good urban street tree, tolerant of pollution, salt spray and soil compaction, and not tall enough to interfere with power lines.

Two sources are Arbor Village Nursery (Box 227, Holt, MO 64048), and Greer Gardens (1280 Goodpasture Island Road, Eugene OR 97401). *The Avant Gardener* Oct. 2007