

The Plantsman's Choice

Presenting promising urban trees

Amur maackia

Maackia amurensis – a plant with the potential to be an interesting urban tree for tough sites

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The genus *Maackia* comprises about 11 species. In cultivation it is mainly represented by the north-east Asian Amur maackia (*Maackia amurensis*). Most species in the genus are found in east and south-east Asia. Knowledge of species other than *Maackia amurensis* is very limited, and they are certainly scarce in public plantations.

Amur maackia is found naturally in eastern Siberia, Korea, north and north-east China as well as on the islands of Hokkaido and Honshu in Japan. It grows naturally on forest edges and scree slopes. Its ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen means that it develops successfully even in relatively poor environments. In cultivation, the species is often described as being

tolerant of a wide variety of site situations, with continued good development. However, the species favours heat and performs best in (micro)climates with warm summer temperatures. Amur maackia usually develops into a large shrub or a small multi-stemmed tree, 6–10m high and 4–6m wide.


This species has a number of seasonal features that provide interest throughout the year. In late spring the leaves unfurl like a fern. At first, these new leaves look 'icy' because they are covered in a dense mantle of white hairs that protect the young leaves from late frosts. From a design perspective these leaves also mean it contrasts with other plants at this time of year. In early summer, the leaves lose their silvery appearance and become dark green, before turning a bright yellow in autumn. Another striking seasonal quality of Amur maackia is its generous flowering which occurs in Sweden during a period when few other species flower – in late July and early August. The creamy white, slightly upright flowers are greatly appreciated by nectar-gathering insects. At the botanical garden in Gothenburg it is possible by midsummer to hear where Amur maackia is growing because of the soft buzzing from all the insects that seek out this tree when there are few other sources of nectar.

At present, Amur maackia must be considered a rarity, but it has the potential to be an exciting feature of park areas, squares or courtyards as it can cope with a wide range of habitat conditions in addition to providing a rich array of aesthetic attributes. The species is quite slow in its establishment and early development in a cool summer climate, so it should be placed in a warm microclimate to promote its development wherever possible. It should also be placed in a location where it is not exposed to wear: young specimens are very susceptible to breaking.

Amur maackia is not typically available as a standard tree in most nurseries. Consequently, you will usually have to settle for a smaller plant. An exciting variety



Amur maackia in Gothenburg Botanic Garden, Sweden, early May.

of the species, which is available from several nurseries in Europe, is *Maackia amurensis* 'Summertime'. It develops a more compact upright growth habit, is 4–6m high and 3–4.5m wide. It has the beautiful icy leaves that emerge in spring followed by an abundance of fragrant creamy-white flowers in summer. The variety has a similar habitat tolerance to the species-type. 

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