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Geijera parviflora

Geijera parviflora is an attractive, broad-crowned, evergreen tree from Southeastern Australia where it is known by the aboriginal name wilga. It is also known as Australian willow because its slender pendant leaves give the tree a superficial resemblance to weeping willow. Geijera is a small genus (about 7 species) in the Citrus family, the Rutaceae, which occurs in eastern Australia, eastern New Guinea, New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands.

Geijera parviflora is an inland species of semi-arid undulating plains extending from westernmost South Australia eastward to northwestern Victoria, central New South Wales and northeastern Queensland, mostly occurring in scrublands. In one area in central New South Wales it occurs with several trees and shrubs known in cultivation in California, including Acacia pendula, A. dealbata, A. cardiophylla, A. baileyana, A. cultriformis, Pittosporum phylliraeoides, Dodonaea viscosa, Myoporum desertii, Bursaria spinosa, Eucalyptus sideroxylon, E. tereticornis, E. bridgesiana, Heterodendron oleaefolium. In this part of Australia wilga is usually a palatable forage plant although some individuals, no different in appearance, are apparently unpalatable and not browsed.

The attractive shapely habit of wilga has made it a useful ornamental in Australia as a shade tree, for planting in parks and avenues and as a windbreak. It is drought tolerant and frost resistant.

Wilga is a recent addition as an ornamental tree in California. It was introduced to the Citrus Experiment Station, Riverside, probably because of its relationship to citrus shortly after the establishment of the station. Seed from New South Wales was received at the station by way of the United States Department of Agriculture in 1920. Two trees planted in 1921 are about 35-40 feet tall and broadly spreading.

It was not until the 1950's that the potential of Geijera parviflora as a street and ornamental tree for California was realized. Seeds of it were received in 1951 from Australia by Saratoga Horticultural Foundation. These produced a number of seedlings, one when it was 3 feet tall in a five gallon container was planted in the test plot in November 1954. In May 1958 it was 8 feet tall with a crown diameter of 7 feet and in November 1962 it was 18 feet tall.

In the meantime Maunsell Van Rensselaer, the Director of the Saratoga Horticultural Foundation, had learned of the Riverside

trees and in the mid-1950's seeds from these trees were supplied to the Foundation. By 1958 the Foundation had a stock of small trees in containers ready for distribution and Maunsell Van Rensselaer wrote that the Foundation staff was convinced... "Geijera parviflora has great promise as a streetside tree where a medium-sized, evergreen, drought-enduring tree is needed". (Van Rensselaer 1958).

References:

Van Rensselaer, Maunsell. 1958. A New Shade Tree: Geijera parviflora.
Journal California Horticultural Society, 19: 4.

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