



Princess tree

Object No. 7 | Bakala Hall

Princess tree, one of the most impressive trees on the European continent, is located in front of the Břetislav Bakala's Hall at the Žerotínovo square.

The square got its name after the Moravian patriot Charles of Žerotín. The Bakala Hall is named after the Czech conductor and composer. Today, the building serves as a multifunctional cultural center. Roughly on its place there was a theatre once, a permanent seat of the National Theatre Brno. In it, film and theatrical stars such as Karel Höger or Oldřich Nový, acted. Also Břetislav Bakala worked at the National Theatre for several years. The era of the theatre is commemorated today by a memorial plaque placed at the beginning of the street Veveří.

Princess tree, *Paulownia tomentosa*, is named in honor of Anna Pavlovna, the daughter of Russian Tsar Paul I. Nevertheless, it's homeland is China, and so it is also known as the Chinese tree. Very soon, however, it came to Japan, and in 1830, also to Europe. This very attractive woody plant is planted in our Latitudes as an ornamental tree in gardens and parks.

Princess tree is a fast growing tree, growing to a height of 15-20 metres. Is conspicuous by its large leaves, up to 35 cm long. Wide ovate leaves are dark green and tomentose. (They are sometimes confused with the leaves of *Catalpa speciosa*, which is also a part of the tree trail). In spring, your attention is grabbed by a rich panicles of purple or royal blue flowers, which germinate even before the foliage. The flowers are tubular and resemble those of foxglove. The fruits are egg-shaped capsules, which often remain on the tree until the next year. Initially they are green, through the process of maturing they lignify and change color to dun.

Princess tree is very resistant to pollution. It can survive a fire, because its roots are capable of regeneration. Young plants often freeze to the ground, but sprout once again in the spring.

The wood of a Princess tree is very light and solid and has great resonance qualities, therefore, in Asia, it is used for the manufacture of musical instruments. From the gently mottled wood chopsticks are produced. From the 19th century onwards, soft seeds of Princess tree were commonly used by Chinese traders as a packaging material for the transport of porcelain. In China and Japan, carving of the wood of this tree is an important artistic craft.

In China, it is an old custom to plant a Princess tree on the day when a girl is born. A fast growing tree grows along with her. Before the wedding, the tree is hewn down and the objects into her trousseau are produced from it.