

Willow trees with a twist

The Chinese willow is a quick-growing tree that is perfect for all four seasons

Question: My neighbor has a Curly willow tree. Would that be a good tree for my yard?

Answer: The Chinese willow, *Salix matsudana* ‘Tortusa’, is a species of willow native to northeastern China. Named in honor of a Japanese botanist, Sadahisa Matsuda, this unusual deciduous tree is also known as curly willow, tortured willow and corkscrew willow.

Unlike weeping willows, these trees have an upright form. The corkscrew willow has a unique branching habit. As the tree grows, its branches reach out horizontally and then twist every way possible, creating curls or corkscrews.

Corkscrew willows are fast-growing. Like most willows, they grow about 24 inches a year, reaching a mature height of 25-30 feet with a spread of 15-20 feet. They prefer moist soil and their roots stay shallow and near the surface.

Aggressive roots are a challenge with corkscrew willows. It is best to plant these trees away from homes and other structures because their moisture-seeking, shallow roots have been known to crack sidewalks, driveways and even sewer and water lines. They are hardy from Zones 4-8 and can grow equally as well in clay, loam or sand. They can grow in sunny or partly shady areas, but because they like moisture, be sure to water this tree during periods of drought.

The corkscrew willow has a characteristically short lifespan. Many fast-growing trees suffer from weak trunks, brittle branches and are prone to weather damage and breakage. Prune the corkscrew willow regularly to allow air and sunlight to enter the center of



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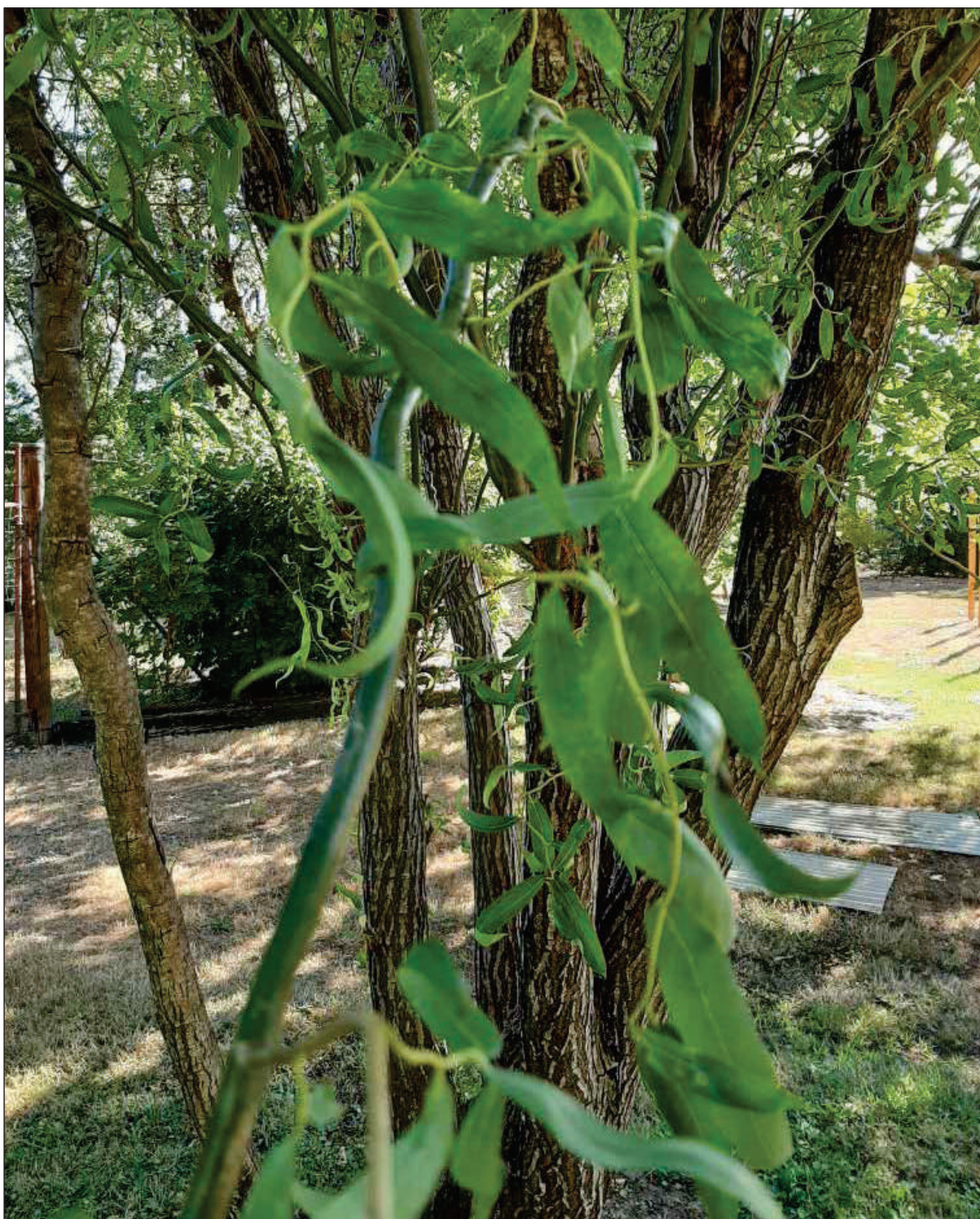
the tree. A healthier tree, free of damaged or dead branches, is less prone to insect damage.

Aphids, borers, gypsy moths and willow beetles are pests commonly attracted to willows. Most horticultural extension offices do not recommend sprays, but rather sticky bands that can be placed around the tree which capture the crawling critters as they head upward. The tree is relatively disease-resistant, although it is susceptible to powdery mildew and leaf spot.

Truly a tree for all four seasons, the corkscrew willow adds interest to your garden all year round. In the spring, it has lovely buds. In the summer, its fall colored leaves provide shade and during the fall, the leaves turn a bright, almost pure yellow before dropping to the ground. Winter highlights the corkscrew willow’s branches, which are dramatic and interesting when the leaves are gone.

The corkscrew willow is a popular tree choice, as it grows to its mature height very quickly, it has a beautiful shape and is generally disease-resistant. In the right location and with the right care, a corkscrew willow will provide you with year-round enjoyment.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEBBY FINLEY

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