The royal paulownia, also known as the princess tree or empress tree, is a deciduous tree native to China that has been introduced here in America. It is now somewhat common along rivers, roadsides, and fence rows in Virginia and eastern West Virginia, where I live. It has large, heart-shaped leaves and purple flowers on clusters that point upward. The showy blooms in May are a sure sign that winter is gone for good.

The trees can grow to moderate size but the wood is relatively light and weak. Paulownias are often broken or blown over in storms. In the Orient the wood is sometimes favored for the soundboards of stringed musical instruments. The soft wood is a uniform creamy color. I occasionally make dulcimer soundboards with paulownia and they sound very nice. “The Royal Paulownia Hornpipe” is played as part of a medley on the CD Bucks And Does.