

TREE OF THE MONTH – July 2011

Golden False Acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia')

The golden false acacia is gorgeous at this time of year when its bright chartreuse foliage lights up the garden landscape. 'Frisia' is especially lovely on cloudy days, when the leaves appear to almost glow, contrasting beautifully against darker trees. The colour lasts until late fall, becoming more golden before the leaves drop. Its white flowers, whose nectar makes excellent honey, turn into long, pea-like seed pods that are quite poisonous.

The cultivar 'Frisia' was developed in Holland in 1935 from the wild species, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, native to the Eastern United States. *Robinia* is in the pea family (Fabaceae), and like most legumes, it has a symbiotic relationship with nitrogen-fixing bacteria living in its root system, improving the soil as it grows. Tolerant of poor soils, drought and pollution, it is suitable for any location except waterlogged soils. A vigorous tree, it will reach 7.5 meters by age 10 and as tall as 30 meters by age 60.

Although striking, false acacia can cause headaches for gardeners; its brittle branches break easily in windstorms and it suckers aggressively from the roots when disturbed, creating groves of identical trees if not controlled. Unsurprisingly, this enthusiastic grower is considered invasive in some parts of the world, such as California, Hungary and South Africa, where they have taken over grasslands, wetlands and forests.

Stunning but weedy, golden false acacia must be cultivated responsibly.

It is up to each gardener to avoid plants on their local invasive plant list, and to ensure that, if grown, they are kept under control and not allowed to escape into the wider world.