

Hughie Jones - January 2020

***Stewartia monadelph* - Theaceae**
Orangebark Stewartia or Tall Stewartia

The Japanese principle of wabi-sabi is the intuitive appreciation of understated beauty. The wabi-sabi aesthetic grew out of Buddhist philosophy in Japan and involves an appreciation for the forms and changes of natural landscapes. Wabi-sabi gardening allows the gardener and visitors to explore the beautiful ways nature changes human-made objects and landscapes.

And the trees that embody this are in the genus *Stewartia* with their graceful form, irregularly mottled bark and demure white flowers. When spring flowering trees have passed, stewartias fill that quiet moment in early summer with their camellia-like flowers.

Stewartia is in the tea family (Theaceae) along with other ornamental genera such as *Camellia*, *Franklinia*, and *Schima*. *Stewartia* encompasses approximately 20 species with a surprisingly wide distribution - from the moist montane forests of China into the Japanese archipelago, and to the ecologically-rich river corridors of the southeastern United States.

Stewartia monadelph grows in Japan throughout the mountainous south-central Honshu, Kyushu and Shikoku. In the picture below you can see its small, delicate flowers. Even the bracteole can be attractive, resembling green butterflies before the flowers open. Unlike the polished bark of *S. pseudocamellia* or *S. sinensis*, it peels to reveal a handsome cinnamon-red colour. And for autumn colour, you need to patiently wait. *Stewartia monadelph* is the last hardy deciduous species to colour in autumn.



You might wonder how this small tree species got the common name of tall Stewartia. Although the flowers, fruit and leaves are small, the mature tree in the wild is tall. In 1914 plant collector Ernest Wilson photographed several large trees growing with wheel tree (*Trochodendron aralioides*) on Yakushima island in Japan - one in his photographs measured 17 m tall and 2.5 m diameter at breast level. However, trees in cultivation do not approach the scale of their wild counterparts as they grow moderately.

In cultivation orangebark Stewartia grows to 8 m in height and width. This small tree, commonly grown for its stunning reddish-brown bark, offers exceptional features throughout the year. Its white camellia-like flowers burst forth in early summer, followed by interesting brown seed pods and rich russet fall color. The white cup-shaped flowers last up to four weeks and have petals with smooth edges.

Orange bark Stewartia is best grown in partial shade but can handle full sun in the Pacific Northwest. This tree prefers slightly acidic, well-drained loamy soil rich in organic matter. It makes an excellent specimen tree for the home landscape. And orange bark Stewartia is guaranteed to cheer up a winter garden - it brightens even the dreariest rainy day.



January 2020 pictures of *Stewartia monadelpha* planted at VanDusen in 1973

https://www.arboretumwespelaar.be/userfiles/file/pdf/080600_Stewartia%20Plantsman%20published.pdf

<https://botanicgardens.uw.edu/about/blog/2015/06/05/june-2015-plant-profile-stewartia-monadelpha/>

<https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/garden-how-to/design/ideas/using-wabi-sabi-in-gardens.htm>