



Neophytes – the robinia

Neophytes are plants that people brought to areas after 1492, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly. But those that haven't been there before. One of them, for example, is the robinia, which was named Tree of the Year in 2020.

It originally comes from the eastern USA and has been in Europe for about 400 years. Robinia is also planted in parks almost everywhere in Europe. It is a deciduous tree that can grow 20-30 meters tall. It also has an umbrella-like crown and white, pleasantly scented flowers. They grow to 10-20cm and have an oblong shape resembling a grape. These then later turn into reddish-brown pods of flowers, which then contain 4-10 kidney-shaped seeds inside. It is not only beautiful, but also very valuable because the wood is very easy to use.

The robinia wood is one of the heaviest and hardest types of wood. It is tough, flexible, elastic and even superior to oak in many technical properties, but it is hard to dry. It is also good firewood for the fireplace.

While that's all well and good, robinia can be quite toxic. It gives the nutrient-poor soil nitrogen, which endangers dry, nutrient-poor grassland species. In addition, the plant can poison people as well as animals, although it rarely happens. If small, curious children chew on the seeds or the bark, they could get poisoned. You get symptoms like nausea, stomach pain, cramps and diarrhea. For animals it is a deadly poison. The animals will then get an increased heart rate, stomach and intestinal inflammation with cramps and damage to the liver and kidneys.



Robinia in bloom, picture: Doronenko,
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