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Platanus occidentalis

Bloom Color Red
Bloom Time Spring

Leaf Color Green

Fruit Color Brown
The fruit is dry and round.

Environment

This plant tolerates drought, flooding and some salt. This plant will grow in very dry to wet or submerged soil. Suitable soil is well-drained/loamy, sandy or clay. The pH preference is an acidic to alkaline (less than 6.8 to more than 7.7) soil.

Landscape Uses

- Seashore planting
- Street tree
- Pollarding

Platanus occidentalis

American Sycamore, American Planetree,
Sycamore

Platanaceae (Plane Tree)

Nomenclature: Royal Hort. Society

Type Tree, woody plant
Hardy range 4B to 9A
Height 70' to 90' / 21.40m to 27.40m
Spread 70' to 80' / 21.40m to 24.40m
Growth rate Fast
Form Pyramidal and rounded
Exposure Full sun
Persistence Deciduous

Attributes and Features

- Attracts birds
- Inconspicuous blooms
- Persistent fruit
- Attractive fruit
- Fruit can be a litter problem
- Sensitive to ozone

Native Habitat

Eastern North America from Maine to Texas to river bottoms in panhandle Florida. Common on mucky soils around lakes and ponds and bottoms of slopes along streams and rivers. Best growth occurs in sandy or loamy soil where water is available to roots all year without summer flooding. Flooding in summer for more than two weeks can kill trees if the entire root system and trunk is inundated. Trees occasionally can be found colonizing old fields in the middle portion of its range. Found from sea level to 2500.

Additional Notes

This plant typically grows with one trunk.
Little pruning is required.
This plant is moderately flammable.
National champion is 129 x 105 feet in Ohio.

Culture Notes

This tree is simply too large and messy for most residential landscapes unless you are desperate for shade and have lots of spare time to rake mountains of leaves. They are best suited for soils which are moist and do not dry out. Dry soil can lead to short life for this wet-site-tolerant tree.

Sycamore has been cursed by horticulturists and others because it is said to be messy, dropping bark, leaves and small twigs throughout the year, particularly in dry weather. However, the tree grows in places which appear most unsuitable to plant growth, such as in small cut out planting pits in sidewalks and in other areas with low soil oxygen and high pH. Unfortunately, aggressive roots often raise and destroy nearby sidewalks. Allow at least 12 feet (preferably more) of soil between the sidewalk and curb when planting as a street tree.

Sycamore is subject to attacks of anthracnose in wet, cool springs. This disease causes a severe witches broom (proliferation of branches) on the ends of the branches and defoliates the plant, especially in northern end of its hardiness range. Trees compartmentalize decay fairly well and resists breakage. Planetrees are among those susceptible to summer branch drop according to surveys in California. Summer branch drop is a phenomena resulting in failure and breakage of large diameter, live branches typically on calm summer days. Wood weighs about 50 pounds per cubic foot.

Consider planting Baldcypress instead of Sycamore for fast shade; and you will not have to rake leaves because Baldcypress foliage drops freely between grass blades and goes largely unnoticed on most landscape surfaces. Rain water washes Baldcypress foliage away on hard surfaces. Pollen causes significant allergies in certain people. Contact with the leaves causes skin rashes.

Wood is considered diffuse porous meaning that there is little difference in size of pores between spring and summer wood.

Maintain adequate mulch area

Clear all turf away from beneath the branches and mulch to the drip line, especially on young trees, to reduce competition with turf and weeds. This will allow roots to become well established and keep plants healthier. Prune the tree so trunks and branches will not rub each other. Remove some secondary branches on main branches with included bark. This reduces the likelihood of the main branch splitting from the tree later when it has grown to become an important part of the landscape. Locate the tree properly, taking into account the ultimate size, since the tree looks best if it is not pruned to control size. The tree can enhance any landscape with its delightful spring flush of foliage. It can be the centerpiece of your landscape if properly located.

Pests, Diseases and Damaging Agents

Pests: Sycamore lace bugs feed on the undersides of the leaves causing a stippled appearance and early leaf drop. Sycamore is considered resistant to gypsy moth.

Diseases: Anthracnose (*Apiognomonia veneta*) can cause early season defoliation but leaves grow back in early summer. It over winters on twigs. Repeated defoliation can cause plants to decline. Canker stain can kill the tree and has caused widespread losses in some areas. A bacterial leaf scorch can kill the tree in several growing seasons, and can cause significant tree losses. Bacterial leaf scorch causes leaf scorch, premature browning, and gradual decline of trees. There is often a yellow line or hallow separating the scorched tissue from green tissue. This disease can be devastating, especially if a street or property is planted in a monoculture. Infection probably spreads by root grafts and certainly by leafhoppers, spittlebugs and sharpshooters. Pruning tools are not likely spread the disease. Neither fertilization nor pruning have any effect on treatment of the disease. There may be chemical treatment that can reduce symptoms but nothing will cure an infected tree. Bacterial leaf scorch can kill trees in several years. *Botrospheria* can kill plants in drought.

This plant is sensitive to damage from ozone air pollution. Damage can occur in urban or rural areas because ozone can travel long distances away from where it is formed. Typical symptoms on deciduous trees are a flecking or stippling only on the upper side of the foliage between large veins. The small spots or flecks are white, tan or orange-red. Spots or flecks from one-eighth to one-quarter inch long appear on needles of sensitive conifers. Yellow bands that girdle the needle may form, eventually causing the tips of the needles to die and/or needles to drop from the plant. If you suspect ozone is causing damage on this plant, locate White Pines (*Pinus strobus*) in the area to see if they are damaged. White Pines are very sensitive to ozone damage and can serve as indicators of the presence of ozone in concentrations high enough to cause plant damage.

Special Notes

This plant has aggressive roots.

