

Carya ovata (Shagbark Hickory) Walnut Family (Juglandaceae)

Introduction:

The shagbark hickory is the symbol of the Pioneer Age. The strong, flexible wood from this Kentucky native is the most valuable of all of the hickories. Shagbark hickory's most prominent ornamental feature is its unique, smoke-gray bark that warps away from the stem in foot-long plates. The edges of long plates of bark curl away from the trunk, giving this tree a very rugged appearance. Shagbark hickory is beautiful when its winter buds open in late spring; the bud scales fold back, petal-like, as new foliage emerges. This hickory offers lightly-hung, downy foliage that casts medium shade in summer. An added attraction for this tree is the delicious edible nut it bears.

Culture:

Shagbark hickory thrives in full sun and rich, well-drained loam. Its native habitat is upland groves. This is the best hickory for ornamental use and it may be used in naturalizing. Wild-grown hickories have deep tap roots that make them difficult to transplant.

This tree is best planted in a park-like area where its large size and litter from leaf, fruit and twig drop will not be a problem. Its savory nuts attract squirrels and other animals that may be unwanted in residential areas.

The hickory bark beetle may be a significant pest on this tree. Other pests may include canker worm, gall aphid and borers. Hickory is susceptible to leaf spot, powdery mildew and crown gall but is resistant to *Verticillium* wilt.

Other Information:

Shagbark hickory was introduced into cultivation in Virginia from Europe in 1629 by John Tradescant. It is the most commonly cultivated hickory today and native populations are rare. Although only one hickory species exists outside of the eastern United States (in eastern China), in pre-glacial history, hickories covered Europe and the Mediterranean.

Shagbark hickory has a sweet, white nut that Native Americans stored in massive quantities and used to make "hickory milk," a nutritious staple of most of their cooking. Hickory sap was also collected by Native Americans and used as syrup or sugar.



Botanical Characteristics:

Native habitat - Central and eastern U.S., including Kentucky.

Growth habit - High-branching with a straight, slender trunk and a narrow crown. Lower branches droop, upper are ascending.

Tree size - This slow-growing species may reach a height of 60 to 80 feet. Shagbark hickory may grow to 120 feet in nature.

Flower and fruit - Male and female flowers are small, without petals and clustered in hanging catkins. Fruit is a thick-shelled 2 ½-inch nut in a green husk.

Leaf - Generally this 8- to 14-inch- long leaf has five leaflets. Fall color is yellow-green to golden yellow and brown.

Hardiness - Winter hardy to USDA Zone 5.

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The wood of shagbark hickory is famous for being heavy and tough, yet flexible and shock-resistant. Because of these qualities, it is used in sporting equipment (skis, lacrosse sticks, archery bows) and tools (ax handles). It was the wood of choice for wagon wheel hubs. Today it is used in sulkies for harness horses. American pioneers used hickory to heat their drafty cabins.

The genus name, *Carya*, is from the Greek name for a walnut tree; its species name, *ovata*, means full oval, referring to its egg-shaped nut husk, buds and leaves. World champion trees can be found in South Carolina (153 feet), Kentucky and Georgia (both 132 feet).



Hickory nuts are edible