

***Catalpa speciosa* (Northern Catalpa)** **Bignonia Family (Bignoniaceae)**

Introduction:

Northern catalpa is known for its beauty and utility. Catalpa's durable wood is often used for posts and railway ties. In the landscape, northern catalpa is very ornamental with large attractive leaves, showy panicles of summer flowers, and decorative hanging pods in the winter.

Culture:

Northern catalpa is a tough, adaptable tree that tolerates urbanization. It enjoys full sun or partial shade in a dry atmosphere. Catalpa is very drought tolerant but it will withstand a variety of soils and moisture levels.

In wet years, northern catalpa may suffer minor damage from powdery mildew. It may also be subject to leaf spots, twig blights, mealy bug infestation and Verticillium wilt.

Northern catalpa unfurls its leaves very late in the season and drops them early in fall. It can be a messy tree when it drops its large leaves, twigs and pods. Because of its brittle wood, northern catalpa tends to lose branches in storms. Pruning may be required to repair storm damage.

Additional information:

Although northern catalpa does not offer a remarkable fall color, its large leaves have a beautiful shape and color that are ornamental in the summer. Fragrant, showy panicles of white flowers have ornamental value in the summer. Very long, stout brown pods hang on the tree throughout winter. Northern catalpa also has an attractive winter form.

The genus name of *Catalpa* refers to the flower shape. Catalpa is a derivative of the Muskogean word for "head and wings".

The beautiful, white flowers are bell-shaped and they have two lips (landing pads), with yellow bands directing pollinators to the nectaries. Although catalpa flowers are bisexual, this species prevents self-pollination by timing release of the flower's pollen prior to, or after, the same flower's egg is mature.



Botanical Characteristics:

Native habitat - Narrow range in southeast U.S., including western Kentucky.

Growth habit - Northern catalpa has a broadly columnar form.

Tree size - This catalpa is a vigorous grower reaching 60 feet in height at maturity with a 40-foot spread.

Flower and fruit - Loose, upright panicles of fragrant white, 2-inch bell-shaped flowers appear on branch tips in mid-summer. Stout, thick-walled, 20-inch pods hang throughout winter and release papery, winged seeds in spring.

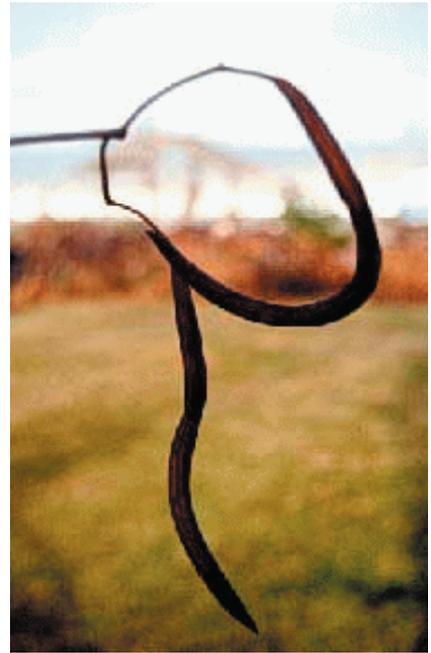
Leaf - Heart-shaped leaves are 12 inches long and 8 inches across and borne on long petioles in whorls of threes. They are smooth and dark green above and very downy and pale green below.

Hardiness - Winter hardy to USDA Zone 4.

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Northern Catalpa is more widely planted than the southern catalpa (*Catalpa bignoniodes*). It is a larger and narrower tree than the southern catalpa and its pods are longer and stouter. It also has larger leaves and its showier flowers open earlier than southern catalpa.

Northern catalpa has extremely durable wood that is rot resistant. Catalpa wood fence posts are reliable for more than 50 years and railway ties last twice as long as other wood. Around 1935, the U.S. government encouraged western farmers to cultivate catalpa to ensure an abundant supply of quality ties for the quickly expanding western railway system. Champion trees are in Michigan (107 feet), Washington (86 feet) and Maryland (70 feet).



Fruit is a long pod