

***Liriodendron tulipifera* (Tulip poplar)**  
**Magnolia Family (Magnoliaceae)**

**Introduction:**

Tulip poplar is the tallest of the native American hardwoods. Kentucky was home to some of the most magnificent of these stately trees. Kentucky, Tennessee and Indiana have named tulip poplar as the state tree. The tree has winter features including duck's bill-shaped buds and furrowed bark. It also offers striking fragrant flowers in May and June. Leaves emerge folded and yellow and become green with age. They turn a clear yellow in autumn.

**Culture:**

Tulip poplar thrives in deep, rich, well-drained but moist soil and full sun. It is sensitive to drought and may require summer irrigation to prevent early leaf abscission.

Tulip poplar is susceptible to *Verticillium* wilt, urban stress (including pollution and soil compaction), and environmental stress (such as drought, spring frost and lightning). Because some trees may be particularly weak-wooded, ice storms and wind may cause significant damage.

Aphids may feed on the foliage and the insect's sticky exudate (and the black sooty-mold that grows on the exudate) drops on whatever is under the tree.

**Cultivars:**

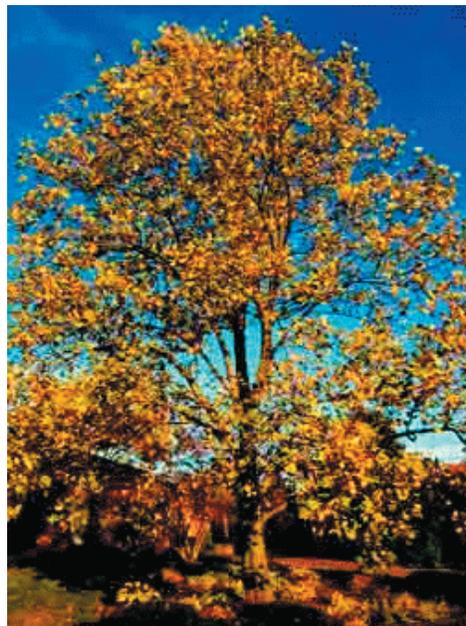
**'Aureo-marginata'** - One of the few cultivars commercially available. Variegated, with a gold leaf-edge and green center; slower-growing than the species with smaller leaves.

**'Ardis'** - A dwarf tree, ¼ to ⅓ the size of the species.

**'Fastigiatum'** - Narrow form, with upright branches nearly parallel to the trunk.

**Additional comments:**

Early North American explorers were impressed with the size of the tulip poplars discovered in the New World. Samples of the species were sent to Europe for cultivation and today tulip poplar is the most popular American tree grown in Europe. After the Civil War, railroads accessing southern Appalachia were built and the massive logging of tulip poplar ensued. The wood was used for canoes, ships, paper pulp and construction.



**Botanical Characteristics:**

**Native habitat:** Eastern U.S. in deciduous woods.

**Growth habit:** In the wild, this tree is known for its straight trunk and high canopy. When cultivated, it is cone-shaped and branches close to the ground.

**Tree size:** A tall, fast-growing tree, reaching 200 feet in the forest and 80 feet as an ornamental tree.

**Flower and fruit:** Orange and green, tulip-shaped flowers appear in May and June. Upright samaras are arranged in a tight spiral that opens when ripe.

**Leaf:** Uniquely shaped, dark green, glossy leaves are bluish-white on the underside. The 6-inch leaves offer consistent, yellow fall color.

**Hardiness:** Winter hardy to USDA zone 4.

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**Additional comments (continued):**

Although the common name suggests it, tulip poplar is not a poplar but in the genus *Liriodendron*. *Leirion* is Greek for a lily and *dendron* is a tree. The genus name and the specific epithet, *tulipifera*, tulip-bearing, refer to the shape of the flowers.



Flower

The tulip poplar flower has a colorful base that guides bees to the flower's source of abundant nectar. Gourmet honey is made from the nectar of this tree and it is also a first choice of hummingbirds.

The inner bark of the trunk and the roots of the tulip poplar are sources of hydrochlorate of tulipiferine, an alkaloid used medicinally as a heart stimulant.

Tulip poplar's fruit is an aggregate group of samaras. A samara is a seed with a wing. In winter, the upright, woody cores of the samara cones persist on branch tips after the samaras have been released.



Leaves in autumn