

## Notable Natives

# American Linden

The American linden (or basswood) is a great choice for home landscaping. *Tilia americana* is a striking shade tree that can reach more than 80 feet in height with a spread of 35 to 40 feet. It has a dense oval canopy and often a single straight trunk although it can also grow in clump form. The dark green, broad, heart-shaped leaves are about six inches long, have toothed edges and turn yellow in the fall. Native to eastern and central North America, it is hardy in northeastern Illinois.

Perhaps its most appealing feature is the scent of its blossoms. In late June and early July, their sweet fragrance fills the air.

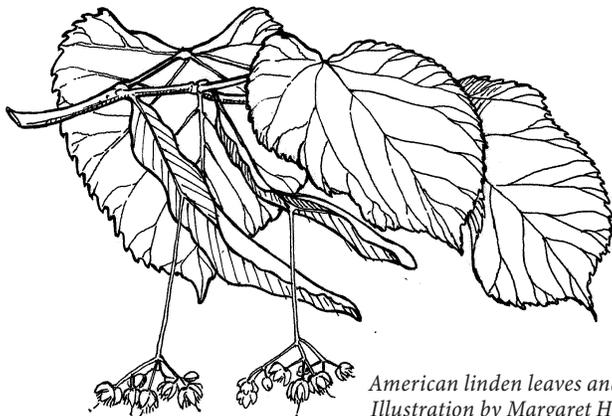


*American linden in winter. Photo by Meredith Tucker.*

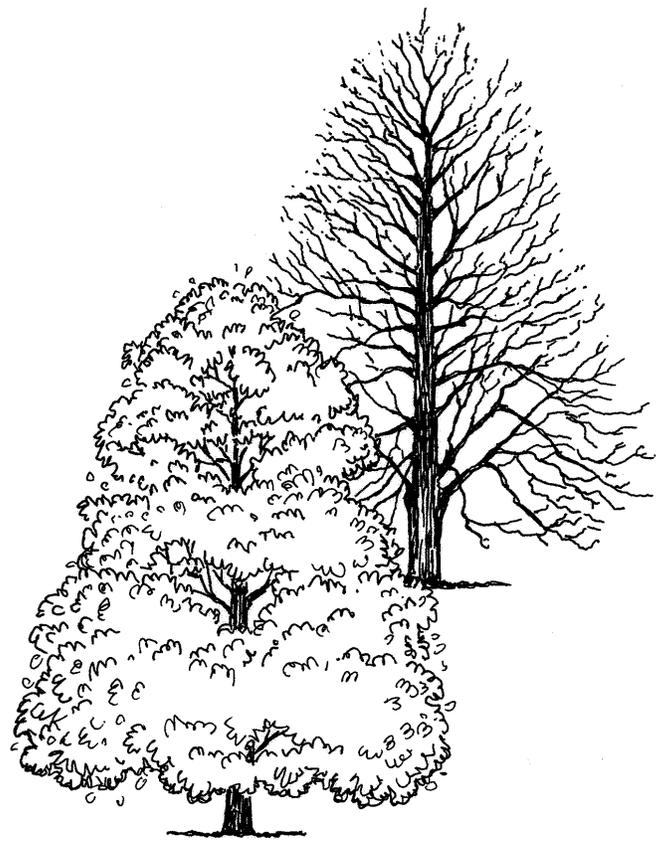
The flower clusters hang on long stalks from the middle of slender, leaf-like bracts. The tiny yellowish-white blossoms exude a powerful scent one can detect from a mile away. Bees abandon most other flowers to gather the basswood's nectar, and the honey they make from it is considered high-quality. In some areas of the country the American linden is called the bee tree.

When the flowers go to seed, gray-brown pea-sized nuts form, each containing one or two seeds which ripen in the fall. The leafy wing bracts act as parachutes to carry the seeds to the ground. Nuts may linger on the tree until midwinter.

The name basswood comes from the inner bark or bast, which is very fibrous and was used by Native Americans and



*American linden leaves and flowers. Illustration by Margaret Hudson.*



*American linden in summer (foreground) and winter. Illustration by Margaret Hudson.*

early European settlers to make rope and matting. The wood is soft, cream colored, and easy to cut, with an even grain that makes basswood a favorite with carvers.

When selecting a site for the American linden, pick an area



*American linden in May. Photo by Meredith Tucker.*

with medium loam soil that is moderately well-drained. The young tree needs to be watered during dry periods but does not tolerate continuously wet soil. It can take partial shade, so planting near other trees is not a problem. It grows rapidly, which makes it a real asset for landscaping an open site.

— Linda Novak