

Notable Natives

Hackberry

If you're planning to add a tree to your yard and want something beautiful, hardy, native, and wildlife-friendly, please consider a hackberry *Celtis Occidentalis*. As a mature tree the hackberry has a broad crown with arching branches, its silhouette resembling that of an American elm. It is sometimes called a "false elm" and is an excellent replacement for that venerable native tree.



Young hackberry tree. Photo by Meredith Tucker.

The hackberry reaches 50' to 70' tall and 50' wide, and under good conditions it lives up to 200 years. Its yellowish gray bark often has corky warts or ridges. Its flowers are unremarkable,



Corky warts and ridges in common hackberry bark. Photo by Meredith Tucker.

and the fruit is a very small greenish drupe (a pitted berry like cherry) ripening to dark red or black. The drupe is attractive

to birds like the cedar waxwing and robin as well as other wildlife. These fruits persist into the winter months providing sustenance for birds and other wildlife when they most need it.



Young hackberry tree in autumn. Photo by Meredith Tucker.

The tree hosts the hackberry butterfly *Asterocampa celtis*. Other butterflies using it are the hackberry emperor, mourning cloak and question mark. Additionally, it provides cover for wildlife and nesting sites for birds.

The common hackberry has been called "one tough tree" for a variety of reasons. Although it likes moist soil, it is especially tolerant of a wide range of temperatures and rainfall, soil conditions, winds and air pollution. It can tolerate periods of drought because of its deep root system; those roots also serve as a deterrent to soil erosion. Hackberry has been used as a tree-line planting to combat wind erosion.

Its growth rate varies considerably from one place to another, but it can grow 12" to 15" annually in moist or wet areas. As rainfall decreases, so does its growth rate. In drier soils the hackberry can be shorter and more shrubby in appearance. However, it tolerates dry soils and is a wonderful choice for a street tree. It is subject to nipple gall which creates small bumps on the leaves; the condition has no deleterious effect on the tree.

Please consider planting a hackberry if you want a strong, healthy native tree that provides ecosystem services to our birds and pollinators and to ourselves.

— Karen Rosene