

American Basswood

Tilia americana

American Linden, Bee Tree

American Basswood is a medium sized, rapidly growing tree of the eastern hardwood forests. It is most commonly 40-50 feet tall but is capable of growing to 100 feet and develops a thick trunk. An important timber tree, the soft and light wood has many uses in wood products. The tree is also a valuable wildlife tree providing nectar for bees, browse for deer, and seed for small mammals. While Basswood is nitrogen demanding and grows poorly on deficient soils, it is useful in bringing calcium and magnesium up from deep in the soil profile and redepositing it in leaf litter. The common name is from "bastwood," referring to the many uses of the inner bark by Native Americans. The tree is pyramidal when young but develops an upright, oval canopy atop a tall, straight trunk. American Basswood is very common at Orion Farms, NY.



Identification

Leaves

Deciduous, alternate, simple, pinnately veined, ovate to cordate, 5-6" with serrate margins. Unequally cordate. Green to yellow in fall.



Flower/Fruit

Monoecious; fragrant, yellow-white, perfect flowers in late spring after leaf out. Fruit is a tan, nut-like drupe, <1/2" sphere containing a single seed.



Bark/Wood

Gray or brown, ridged with long, shallow furrows. Appears fibrous. Wood is light colored and weak.



Form

Medium to large sized tree. Pyramidal shape when young but develops an upright, oval canopy atop tall, straight trunk with age. Storm damaged branches.



Uses

The soft wood that works exceptionally well is valued for hand carving. Basswood flowers make wonderful honey. Other uses for the wood include boxes, toys, blinds, and pulp. It is also used as a shade and street tree.

Ethnobotany

The inner bark, or bast, was used as a source of fiber for making rope and fish nets and for weaving mats and baskets. Once the source of prosthetic limbs. The sap was boiled into syrup and medicinal purposes.

Native Distribution

Northern tier states from Maine in the east to Minnesota in the west; south to Ohio River Valley.

Establishment

Basswood initially establishes long taproot supplemented by lateral roots. Remove sprouts.

Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 80'Hx35'Wx2'dbh
 USDA Zone 3-8
 Light Requirements Shade to Full Sun

Soils Diverse
 Drought Tolerant? Moderate
 Inundation Tolerant? Moderate

Pests/Damaging Agents

Considered nitrogen demanding and grows poorly on nutrient degraded sites. Insect pests generally not serious. Moderate susceptibility to gypsy moth. Anthracnose not usually serious.

Similar Species

Red Mulberry
 Leaves are similar and when immature, American Basswood is somewhat similar to Red Mulberry. Similarity begins and ends with the leaf.

Propagation

Seeds - demonstrate poor germination due to impermeable testa. Cold stratify. Acid bath.

Source(s)

Seed collected from Orion Farms, Philadelphia, NY.