

# American Elm

*Ulmus americana*

White Elm

This is the famous shade tree of New England whose native range extends to the Rocky Mountains and south to Texas. Once a dominant urban tree of the east coast, during the 1920s and 1930s was planted almost to the exclusion of other trees. This lack of diversity coupled with the introduction of an exotic damaging fungal agent (Dutch Elm disease) and an insect carrier allowed the trees to be ravaged. Many have fallen victim. The fungal disease is spread via elm bark beetles. Saskatoon is successful in stemming the disease advance by wrapping the trunk with sticky traps. Elm wood is heavy, hard, tough, and difficult to work. Difficult to split, it is used for hockey sticks. Because of its spreading, fan-shaped form and graceful, pendulous branches, the American Elm justifiably holds its place as one of the United States' most beautiful trees.



## Identification

### Leaves

The leaves are simple, alternately arranged, and deciduous. Ovate with inequilateral base, 3-6" long. Margin is doubly serrate. Yellow in autumn.



### Bark/Wood

Young trees have dark grayish bark. As the tree matures, bark becomes ash-gray and scaly.



### Flower/Fruit

Monoecious, though generally self-sterile; perfect small red flowers on short fascicles coincident with leaf flush. Seed is a samara.



### Form

Large tree, gracefully spreading and fan-shaped. Rooting habit varies with soils from tap root to broad laterals.



### Uses

Prized as an urban shade tree. The wood of American Elm is heavy, hard, and stiff. The interlocked grain is difficult to split and good for use in hockey sticks and rocking chair rockers. Some used for boxes and crates. Pulp.

### Ethnobotany

An infusion made from the bark and/or inner bark was used in the treatment internal bleeding, coughs, dysentery, infections, cramps, and diarrhea. Bark fibers were used in basketry, rope, and paper production.

### Native Distribution

Widely distributed east of the Mississippi. Can be grown in all of the continental United States.

### Establishment

Transplants easily. Requires pruning to establish strong form.

## Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 120'Hx80'Wx6'dbh  
 USDA Zone 2-9  
 Light Requirements Full Sun

Soils Diverse  
 Drought Tolerant? Yes  
 Inundation Tolerant? Yes

### Pests/Damaging Agents

The fungal agent, Dutch elm disease, is introduced into vascular tissue by bark beetles. Sticky traps can help. New growth susceptible to ice/wind damage.

### Similar Species

Members of the *Ulmus* genus are readily differentiated by their leaves. Closest in appearance are the Rock Elm and Slippery Elm.

### Propagation

Seed - can immediately germinate soon after it falls though remains viable for greater than a year.

### Source(s)

Transplant of volunteer from Orange Co. Botanical Garden, Montgomery, NY.