

American Hophornbeam

Ostrya virginiana

Ironwood

This shade tolerant tree slowly grows to 30-40 feet with a 25-30 foot spread, forming an oval or round canopy. Hophornbeam has a lovely yellow fall color and the small nutlets which ripen in summer and fall are used by birds and small mammals throughout the winter. The nutlets develop within a fruiting body that looks strikingly like hops, hence its name. The name "hornbeam" comes from the German for "tough tree." The bark is an attractive orange or grayish brown that peels off in longitudinal strips. It is a rugged tree and is often found on marginal sites and will even grow on dry, rocky sites with little soil. Hophornbeam can grow with a single trunk or multiples that can be a dramatic addition to the landscape. Seeds will form after about 15 years. American Hophornbeam is a common forest component of Orion Farms, NY.



Identification

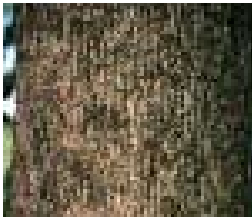
Leaves

Deciduous, alternate, simple, 3-5" long ovate, with many teeth along the margin. Leaf resembles American Elm. Pale green above and paler beneath.



Bark/Wood

Orange or grayish scaly brown bark that peels away in elongate, narrow strips. Wood is close grained, extremely hard, but not large enough for lumber.



Flower/Fruit

Monoecious; male and female flowers are borne on separate catkins. Seeds are enclosed in a papery husk borne in pendant cone clusters 2".



Form

Hophornbeam is a relatively small tree, usually oval but can be of rounded crown in the open. Root system is shallow.



Uses

Its primary use is as a landscape specimen and an excellent addition to the woodland garden. It is also used as a reclamation tree. Though of small diameter and too small for lumber, the wood is used as fence posts, tool handles, and mallets.

Ethnobotany

Native Americans made bows from the wood of Hophornbeam.

Native Distribution

Nova Scotia west to North Dakota, south to the Gulf Coast.

Establishment

Rugged tree tolerant of poor soil conditions. Requires pruning to maintain single trunk.

Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 40'Hx30'Wx1'dbh
 USDA Zone 3-9
 Light Requirements Shade to Part Sun

Soils Diverse
 Drought Tolerant? Yes
 Inundation Tolerant? Moderate

Pests/Damaging Agents

No diseases of this tree are usually serious.

Similar Species

American Hornbeam
 The leaves, bark and habitat are similar, however, the fruiting structure is very different. American Hornbeam fruits are arranged more openly like a Japanese pagoda.

Propagation

Seed - warm stratified for several months followed by cold stratification. Slow to germinate.

Source(s)

Seed collected from Orion Farms, Philadelphia, NY.