

Pignut Hickory

Carya glabra

Pignut Hickory is a common tree of eastern North America. The green fruits are quite bitter, but quite popular with wildlife. Pignut Hickory nut kernels have very high levels of crude fat, up to 80% so are an important part of the wildlife diet. Pignuts comprise up to 25% of the overall diet of several species of squirrel. It is a prolific seed producer when masting about every other year. A well formed tree, it reaches heights of 60 feet with a 30-40 foot spread without competition creating a coarse, oval canopy. The strong but irregularly spaced branches resist breakage in storms, making it useful as a shade tree. The wood, like all hickories, is dense, has bending qualities, and can withstand compression and shock better than most. Pignut Hickory is a major component of the Orion Farm natural forests.



Identification

Leaves

Deciduous, alternate, pinnately compound, 8-12 inches long with 5-7 leaflets. Leaflets are lanceolate and serrate, green above and paler below.



Bark/Wood

Initially smooth and light gray, soon developing ridges or furrows. Bark of very old trees can become scaly and flaky.



Flower/Fruit

Monoecious; staminate yellow-green catkins, pistillate clusters at end of branches in spring. Fruit 1-2" diameter sphere wrapped in green, thin 4-ribbed husk.



Form

Medium sized tree with a symmetrical canopy, smooth outline. Straight trunk. Deeply taprooted in most soils.



Uses

Like all hickory wood, Pignut Hickory is versatile and used for chair legs, tool handles, and for fuel and production of charcoal. Nuts are edible, but not sweet, attracts squirrels and other mammals.

Ethnobotany

Early settlers used the wood in the manufacture of wheels and skis due to the bending capabilities of the wood. They also were able to boil the bark in vinegar to extract a black dye. Native Americans used the inner bark to fashion snowshoes.

Native Distribution

Widely distributed east of the Mississippi.

Establishment

Tree will show minor element deficiencies on alkaline soils.

Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 65'Hx40'Wx2'dbh
 USDA Zone 5-9
 Light Requirements Part to Full Sun

Soils Diverse
 Drought Tolerant? Yes
 Inundation Tolerant? Moderate

Pests/Damaging Agents

Insect pests are prevalent, but rarely are serious unless the tree is under drought stress. Anthracnose an issue in wet climates; powdery mildew in humid environments.

Similar Species

Shagbark, Shellbark
 Shellbark Hickory has 7-9 leaflets as opposed to the 5 of Shagbark. Pignut Hickory bark is much less scaly and the nut husk is thin and papery rather than woody.

Propagation

Seed - 90 days cold stratification.

Source(s)

Seeds collected from Orion Farms, Philadelphia, NY.