

# Shagbark Hickory

*Carya ovata*

Shellbark Hickory

Shagbark Hickory is probably the most distinctive of all the hickories because of its loose-plated bark. The tree has a picturesque, oval outline, taller than it is wide, with upright upper branches, lower branches drooping, and middle branches just about horizontal. Not only is the bark distinctive, but the leaves turn golden yellow in the fall making this an attractive landscape specimen. Growth rate is slow. Cousin to the pecan, the Shagbark Hickory nuts are sweet, though have not been commercially developed. The nuts are a staple of many species of wildlife. The wood is known for its strength, toughness, hardness, and stiffness. It is used for flooring and tool handles. Hickory has been traditionally very popular as fuel and as a charcoal producing wood for its high heat value, even burning, and long lasting heat. Hickory charcoal imparts food with unique smokey flavor.



## Identification

### Leaves

Deciduous, alternate, odd pinnately compound with 5 leaflets. Leaflet oblong, 4-8", serrated margins, green turning yellow in autumn.



### Flower/Fruit

Monoecious, spring flowering. Catkins 4-6" and pistillate flowers on current year shoots. Nuts in clusters of 1-3, obovoid, 4 ribbed, thick, green husk.



### Bark/Wood

Smooth and gray when young. At maturity, gray, loose-plated bark that appears ready to slough off at any moment. It peels off in long strips.



### Form

Grows mostly upright with strong central leader. Considerably taller than it is wide. Some drooping of lowest branches. Strongly tap rooted.



### Uses

Shagbark Hickory nuts are not commercially developed, but has potential. The tough resilient properties of the wood make it suitable for projects subject to impact and stress. The wood also continues to be used for fuel and charcoal.

### Ethnobotany

The sweet nuts were once a staple for Native Americans. Early settlers prized the tree not only for its nuts, but the hard and tough wood for tool handles, charcoal, flooring, and fuel wood.

### Native Distribution

Great Lakes to just above Gulf States and east to New Hampshire.

### Establishment

Growth is slow. Transplanting difficult due to taproot. But, adaptable to many soil types.

## Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 80'Hx35'Wx2'dbh  
 USDA Zone 5-8  
 Light Requirements Part to Full Sun

Soils Diverse  
 Drought Tolerant? Moderate  
 Inundation Tolerant? Moderate

### Pests/Damaging Agents

Aphids, bark beetles, caterpillars, and spittlebugs are all nuisances. Anthracnose can be an issue in wet climates and powdery mildew in high humidity.

### Similar Species

Shellbark, Pignut  
 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 - cold stratify for 90 days. Seed viable for two years and sometimes longer.

### Source(s)

Seed collected from Kimball residence and transplants from Wanderling Park, Walden, NY.