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Native Trees for Tennessee

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Native trees are a natural. They have been in Tennessee since before the arrival of European settlers. Native trees are already part of the ecosystem, contributing to local energy flows and nutrient cycles. Other organisms in the system are adapted to the structure, function and chemical composition of native trees. Birds, insects, fungi and other wildlife recognize and use native trees to support their biological needs. Trees introduced from other countries or areas, the so-called exotics, do not always fulfill these needs.

The most compelling reason to use “native plants” is to prevent the potential disruption of plant communities by the introduction of exotics. Many exotic plants have become unmanageable, diminishing the biodiversity of habitats. Many of these invasives were intentionally introduced for ornamental horticulture or conservation purposes.

While native trees are susceptible to certain pests and diseases, they often handle inclement weather better than exotics. A great drought, a terrible flood or a big freeze comes along now and then and takes its toll on exotic plants less adapted to the area. Native plants, however, are not always more adaptable to the urban environment than introduced (exotic) plants. Often native plants are adapted to

specific niches in the natural environment and do not tolerate urban conditions. For example, many smaller native plants grow in the shade of larger trees. Most urban landscapes provide little or no shade. Also, forested conditions provide topsoil with a higher level of organic matter than found in many urban environments. In short, prudent use of exotics may be justified in some situations.

Many native trees are already used in Tennessee home landscapes. Oaks, maples, dogwood, yellow-poplar and others are common. Many more exist that are seldom used. Until recently, many native trees have not been used in our landscapes because (1) their ornamental characteristics were underappreciated, and (2) low demand did not encourage their development for the market. Native trees and other vegetation have traditionally provided a backdrop and contrast for plants from other areas. A large variety of native plant species can be used instead of exotics for roadside landscaping, wildlife habitat improvement, erosion control, mine reclamation and other purposes. Tennessee’s trees provide an abundance of interesting features such as flowers, fruits, color, bark, aroma, form and size from which to choose.



Wayne Clatterbuck

Fall flowers of witch hazel.



Don Williams

Crimson red fall foliage of blackgum.

The following menu of Tennessee native trees have potential for use in urban forestry and landscape designs. Most are well-described in popular books, gardening encyclopedias and floral manuals. Because of Tennessee's diverse topography and climate, not all of the listed trees will be suitable to all areas of the state. For more information regarding native plants, ask your local garden center, county Extension office or forester.

Large Trees

Botanical Name	Common Name	Botanical Name	Common Name
<i>Acer rubrum</i>	Red Maple	<i>Platanus occidentalis</i>	Sycamore
<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	Silver Maple	<i>Prunus serotina</i>	Black Cherry
<i>Acer saccharum</i>	Sugar Maple	<i>Quercus alba</i>	White Oak
<i>Aesculus</i> spp.	Buckeye	<i>Q. coccinea</i>	Scarlet Oak
<i>Betula nigra</i>	River Birch	<i>Q. falcata</i>	Southern Red Oak
<i>Carya illinoensis</i>	Pecan	<i>Q. lyrata</i>	Overcup Oak
<i>Carya</i> spp.	Hickories	<i>Q. macrocarpa</i>	Bur Oak
<i>Catalpa speciosa</i>	Northern Catalpa	<i>Q. michauxii</i>	Swamp Chestnut Oak
<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>	Hackberry	<i>Q. muehlenbergii</i>	Chinkapin Oak
<i>Diospyros virginiana</i>	Persimmon	<i>Q. nigra</i>	Water Oak
<i>Fagus grandifolia</i>	American Beech	<i>Q. nuttalli</i>	Nuttall Oak
<i>Fraxinus americana</i>	White Ash	<i>Q. pagoda</i>	Cherrybark Oak
<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>	Green Ash	<i>Q. phellos</i>	Willow Oak
<i>Gymnocladus dioicus</i>	Kentucky Coffeetree	<i>Q. prinus</i>	Chestnut Oak
<i>Halesia carolina</i>	Silverbell	<i>Q. rubra</i>	Northern Red Oak
<i>Juglans nigra</i>	Black Walnut	<i>Q. shumardii</i>	Shumard Oak
<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	Eastern Red-Cedar	<i>Q. stellata</i>	Post Oak
<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>	Sweetgum	<i>Q. velutina</i>	Black Oak
<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>	Yellow-Poplar	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>	Black Locust
<i>Magnolia acuminata</i>	Cucumbertree	<i>Sassafras albidum</i>	Sassafras
<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	Blackgum	<i>Taxodium distichum</i>	Baldcypress
<i>Pinus echinata</i>	Shortleaf Pine	<i>Tilia americana</i>	American Linden
<i>Pinus strobus</i>	Eastern White Pine	<i>Tsuga canadensis</i>	Eastern Hemlock
<i>Pinus taeda</i>	Loblolly Pine		


Small Trees

Botanical Name	Common Name	Botanical Name	Common Name
<i>Acer pensylvanicum</i>	Striped Maple	<i>Cornus florida</i>	Dogwood
<i>Acer spicatum</i>	Mountain Maple	<i>Cotinus obovatus</i>	Smoketree
<i>Aesculus pavia</i>	Red Buckeye	<i>Crateagus</i> spp.	Hawthorn
<i>Alnus serrulata</i>	Alder	<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>	Witch Hazel
<i>Amelanchier arborea</i>	Serviceberry	<i>Ilex opaca</i>	American Holly
<i>Amorpha fruticosa</i>	False Indigo	<i>Magnolia virginiana</i>	Sweetbay
<i>Aralia spinosa</i>	Devil's Walking Stick	<i>Ostrya virginiana</i>	Hophornbeam
<i>Asimina triloba</i>	Pawpaw	<i>Oxydendron arboreum</i>	Sourwood
<i>Bumelia lycioides</i>	Buckthorn Bumelia	<i>Rhamnus caroliniana</i>	Carolina Buckthorn
<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>	Hornbeam	<i>Rhus copallina</i>	Shining Sumac
<i>Castanea pumila</i>	Allegheny Chinkapin	<i>Rhus glabra</i>	Smooth Sumac
<i>Cercis canadensis</i>	Redbud	<i>Rhus typhina</i>	Staghorn Sumac
<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>	Fringetree	<i>Syrax</i> spp.	Snowbell
<i>Cladrastis lutea</i>	Yellowwood	<i>Symplocos tinctoria</i>	Sweetleaf

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