

Platanus occidentalis



American sycamore

Family	<i>Platanaceae</i>	
Origin	Native	
WIS Code	FACW	CoC 5

DESCRIPTION

West Virginia's largest tree (to 50 m tall) has a spreading open crown and thin, mottled (green, brown, tan and white) camouflage-like bark that often peels, especially on older mature trees. Twigs grow in a zig-zag pattern with leaf scars encircling the buds. Leaves are simple, alternate, palmately veined (veins radiating from the base) with three to five main lobes, pointed tips and widely toothed margins. The bases of the leaf stalks (petioles) are enlarged and wrap or enclose the buds, and conspicuous leafy stipules also wrap the leaf bases on young shoots.

FLOWERS AND FRUITS

April to May; September to October. Flowers are very small, appear with the leaves, and both male and female flowers are in dense round clusters hanging from a slender stalk. Fruits are balls of tightly clustered seeds (achenes), each attached to fine hair-like bristles for wind dispersal.

HABITAT

Floodplain forests, swamps, stream banks, and rocky stream bars.

SIMILAR SPECIES

Liquidambar styraciflua, American sweetgum, also has ball-like fruits but they are spiky; the leaves are star-shaped and it has dark furrowed bark.



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Platanus occidentalis, fruit



© prairie ridge



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Liquidambar styraciflua, leaf and fruit



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