



## *Catalpa* spp. **Catalpa**<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

*Catalpa speciosa* (Northern Catalpa) grows in a loose oval, 50 feet tall in most urban locations, but occasionally grows to 90 feet (Fig. 1). This coarse, large leaved tree spreads 50 feet and tolerates hot, dry weather, but leaves may scorch and some drop from the tree in very dry summers. *Catalpa bignonioides* (Southern Catalpa) is somewhat smaller reaching about 30 to 40 feet tall, leaves are arranged opposite or in whorls (*speciosa* leaves are opposite) and it is native and has some salt tolerance. A sunny exposure and a well-drained, moist, rich soil are preferred for best growth of Catalpa but they will tolerate a range of soils from acid to calcareous. Both trees have a coarse, very open growth habit forming an irregularly-shaped crown. Popular in older gardens and has a moderately-long life (60 years or so), but trunks on large trees often contain rot. Catalpas are very adaptable and they are tough trees, having naturalized in many parts of the south.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Catalpa* spp.

**Pronunciation:** kuh-TAL-puh species

**Common name(s):** Catalpa

**Family:** *Bignoniaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 5 through 9A (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** native to North America

**Uses:** reclamation plant; shade tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

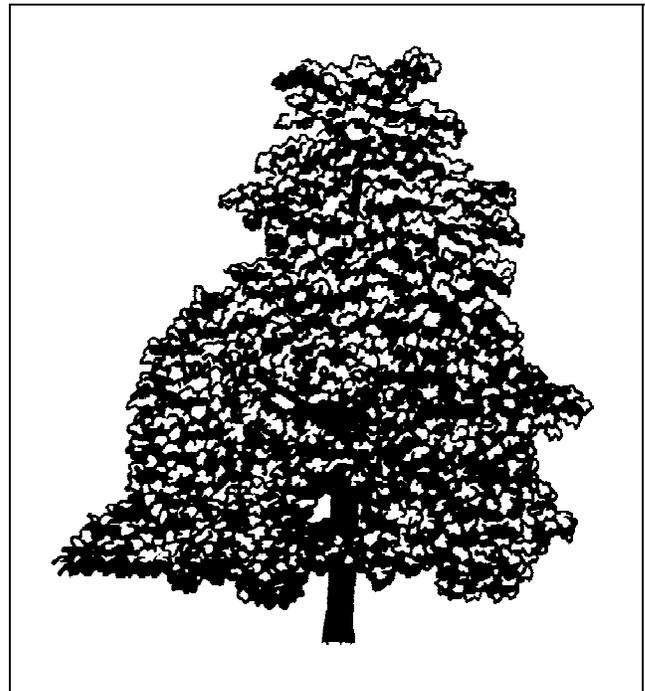


Figure 1. Middle-aged Catalpa.

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

### DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 50 to 60 feet

**Spread:** 40 to 50 feet

**Crown uniformity:** irregular outline or silhouette

**Crown shape:** oval

**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** fast

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2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Texture:** coarse

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite; whorled (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** ovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 8 to 12 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** yellow

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** spring flowering; summer flowering; very showy

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** 12 inches or more

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** brown

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts squirrels and other mammals; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; showy

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown; green

**Current year twig thickness:** stout

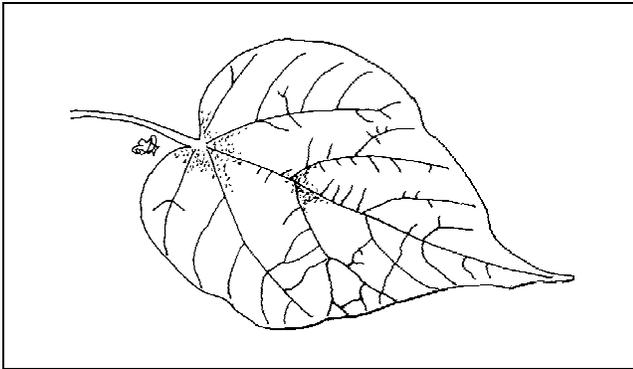


Figure 3. Foliage of Catalpa.

## Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; occasionally wet; alkaline; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

**Soil salt tolerance:** moderate

## Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding

**Invasive potential:** seeds itself into the landscape

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible

**Pest resistance:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

## USE AND MANAGEMENT

Growth is rapid at first but slows down with age as the crown begins to round out and the tree increases in spread. The main ornamental feature is panicles of white with yellow and purple markings produced in spring and early summer, depending on the particular tree. But leaves fall throughout the summer in USDA hardiness zone 8 making a mess and the tree looks ragged with yellow leaves in late summer. Flowers make somewhat of a slimy mess for a short period when they drop on a sidewalk but are no problem falling into shrubs, groundcovers, or turf. The fruit is a long pod (up to two feet long) resembling a string bean that can be a slight litter problem to some, but it is quite interesting. The tree is useful in areas where quick growth is desired, but there are better, more durable trees available for street and parking lot plantings. Sixty-year-old trees in Williamsburg, Virginia have three to four-foot-diameter trunks and

are 40 feet tall. Catalpa often escapes cultivation and invades surrounding woodlands.

Catalpas are planted to attract Catalpa worms, a large caterpillar prized for fish bait because the skin is very tough and the caterpillar is juicy. The caterpillar can be frozen for use as a fish bait at a later time. The caterpillar can defoliate the tree once or twice a year but there appear to be no adverse consequences to the tree.

Catalpa tolerates a wide range of soils, including pH in the 7's, and is moderately drought-tolerant. It is a tough tree suited for planting in large-scale landscapes.

## Pests

The larva of the Catalpa sphinx moth can eat large quantities of leaves. The caterpillar is yellow with black markings. The tree is regularly defoliated and often looks terrible by the end of the summer.

## Diseases

Anthracnose will cause dead areas on the leaves.

Brown leaf spots caused by several fungi can attack Catalpa. They are rarely serious so no chemical control is suggested.

Powdery mildew causes a white powdery coating on the leaves. When severe, the leaves yellow and fall off.

Catalpa is susceptible to verticillium wilt. Branches die and eventually the entire tree may die. A symptom of verticillium wilt is discoloration of the sapwood but the symptom is hard to find.

During hot, dry seasons the leaves may turn yellow and brown due to scorch, but the tree lives. Little can be done other than watering.

Catalpa may turn chlorotic due to a high soil pH, but the tree does not appear to otherwise suffer from alkaline soil.