



Populus alba White Poplar¹

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INTRODUCTION

White Poplar is a fast-growing, deciduous tree which reaches 60 to 100 feet in height with a 40 to 50-foot-spread and makes a nice shade tree, although it is considered short-lived (Fig. 1). The dark green, lobed leaves have a fuzzy, white underside which gives the tree a sparkling effect when breezes stir the leaves. These leaves are totally covered with this white fuzz when they are young and first open. The fall color is pale yellow. The flowers appear before the leaves in spring but are not showy, and are followed by tiny, fuzzy seedpods which contain numerous seeds. It is the white trunk and bark of white poplar which is particularly striking, along with the beautiful two-toned leaves. The bark stays smooth and white until very old when it can become ridged and furrowed. The wood of White Poplar is fairly brittle and subject to breakage in storms and the soft bark is subject to injury from vandals. Leaves often drop from the tree beginning in summer and continue dropping through the fall.

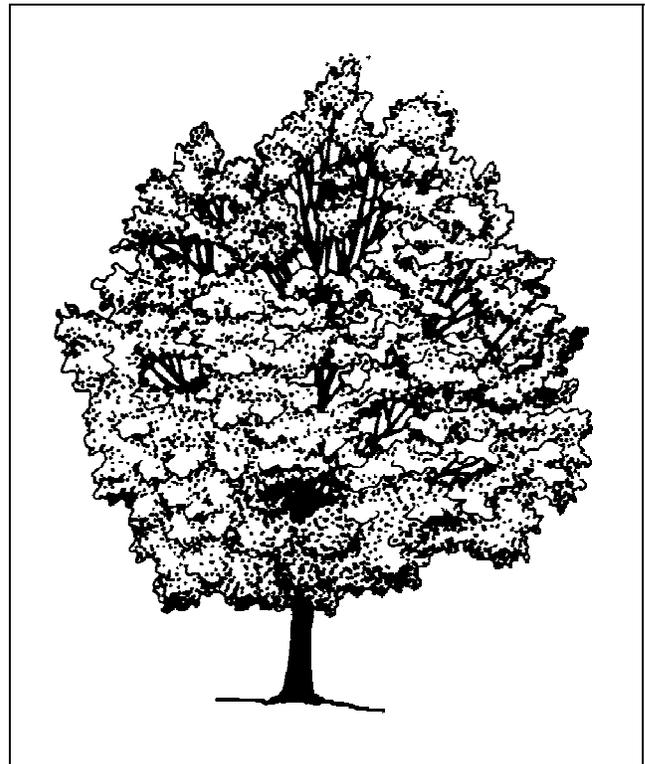


Figure 1. Middle-aged White Poplar.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Populus alba*

Pronunciation: POP-yoo-lus AL-buh

Common name(s): White Poplar

Family: *Salicaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 4 through 9 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: reclamation plant; shade tree; no proven urban tolerance

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

DESCRIPTION

Height: 60 to 100 feet

Spread: 40 to 60 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: oval

Crown density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-499, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.
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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

- Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)
- Leaf type:** simple
- Leaf margin:** lobed; sinuate; undulate
- Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval); star-shaped
- Leaf venation:** palmate
- Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous
- Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches
- Leaf color:** green
- Fall color:** yellow
- Fall characteristic:** not showy

Flower

- Flower color:** yellow
- Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

Fruit

- Fruit shape:** elongated
- Fruit length:** < .5 inch
- Fruit covering:** dry or hard
- Fruit color:** white

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter

Trunk and Branches

- Trunk/bark/branches:** grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
- Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure
- Breakage:** susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break
- Current year twig color:** gray
- Current year twig thickness:** medium

Culture

- Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun
- Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
- Drought tolerance:** high
- Aerosol salt tolerance:** high
- Soil salt tolerance:** good

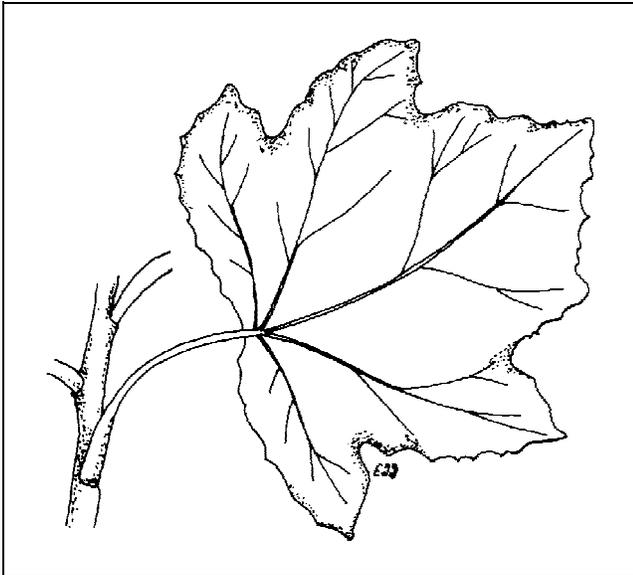


Figure 3. Foliage of White Poplar.

Diseases

Crown gall and trunk cankers can be troublesome.

Other

Roots: surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere with mowing

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: No entries found.

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

USE AND MANAGEMENT

White Poplar should be grown in full sun and tolerates almost any soil, wet or dry. Suckering may be a problem on stressed trees but those growing vigorously are usually not bothered. In areas with much air pollution and soot, the fuzzy white undersides of the leaves may attract and hold dirt and dust making them unattractive.

It's large size and brittle wood limit it to open space plantings such as parks and landfill sites.

The cultivar 'Bolleana' has a columnar growth habit and irregularly-lobed leaf margins and 'Pendula' has a weeping form. 'Bolleana' may be the most commonly planted cultivar.

Pests

This tree usually has not pests of major concern, but occasionally leafhoppers bother it. There are many potential problems.