

Centenarian Trees & Shrubs

Discover the Arboretum's Oldest Trees and Shrubs

The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, founded in 1872, displays North America's premier collection of hardy trees and shrubs on 281 acres. On this tour, visit our oldest and most distinguished residents—woody plants of 100 years of age and older.

A tour of the more than 1,000 trees and shrubs that are over one hundred years old would be unwieldy. This tour, however, can be completed in approximately 1½ hours and focuses on eighteen specimens. Each highlighted plant has an associated accession year—the year when the plant was obtained by the Arboretum (as a seed, cutting, or seedling, etc.)—this is not necessarily the same year in which the specimen was planted in the landscape.

Enjoy your visit with some of the Arboretum's old-timers!

1. Cucumber Magnolia—1880

Magnolia acuminata
15154*D

The common name of this North American native refers to its cucumber-shaped fruits, which are reddish in color. Though the tree grows rapidly, it may take 25 to 30 years to reach flowering size. Considered the hardiest of our native magnolias, the cucumber magnolia may live to be more than 150 years old. At maturity, the architecture of its massive branches is stunning.



2. Tulip Tree—1894

Liriodendron tulipifera
14992*A

One of the tallest trees native to North America, the tulip tree is one of only two species in the genus *Liriodendron*. The tulip tree is an excellent lumber tree—its trunk is very straight, and its branches a good distance up the trunk. Early settlers used it for dugout canoes. The name tulip tree refers to the greenish-yellow, tulip-shaped flowers that bloom in spring. These flowers turn into an attractive fruit that persists through winter.



3. Katsura—1878

Cercidiphyllum japonicum
882*B

The distinctive heart-shaped leaves make katsura a popular ornamental. In fall, its leaves turn a clear yellow to apricot color, and the tree gives off the aroma of burnt sugar. The Arboretum's specimens are 30 to 50 feet tall, but in Japanese forests, they achieve a height of 100 feet and a girth greater than any other deciduous tree. This tree is in decline, but new sprouts from the base could extend its life.



4. Silver Maple—1881

Acer saccharinum
12560*C

The deeply lobed leaves of this eastern North American native are green with a silvery underside, turning yellow in fall. With age, the bark becomes silver-gray and shaggy. It grows quickly, but the limbs are brittle and can break easily in storms. Not just one of the oldest, this is also one of the tallest trees in the Arboretum—a testament to proper pruning and care.



5. Amur Corktree—1882

Phellodendron amurense
143-6*A

This stately tree's thick bark is fissured and springy to the touch. *Phellodendron* belongs to the citrus family. Their compound leaves turn a bright but short-lived yellow in autumn. The blue-black berries that female trees produce persist after the leaves have fallen and are a favorite of mourning doves. Although it is called the corktree, the commercial source of cork is not *Phellodendron* but *Quercus suber*, an oak that is not hardy in this climate.



6. Palm-leaved Bamboo—1891

Sasa senanensis
17578*A

Palm-leaved bamboo withstands the cold winters of the Northeast and has flourished here for more than a hundred years. The Arboretum's planting was propagated using stock from Sapporo, Japan. Its evergreen foliage adds a patch of green in an otherwise brown winter landscape.



7. Goldenraintree—1899

Koelreuteria paniculata
14928-1*B

The common name of this Asian native refers to its golden-yellow flower. The blooms open in July and cover the tree's canopy. Later in the season the flowers develop into papery, brown capsules reminiscent of Chinese lanterns. Each capsule contains a few round, black seeds the size of a pea. Though its flower and fruit look delicate, the goldenraintree is known to be tough—tolerating drought, heat, wind, and pollution—making it a perfect choice for urban environments.



8. American Hophornbeam—1873

Ostrya virginiana
1226*A

The immature fruit of the American hophornbeam is easily mistaken for pale green flowers dangling from the branches. Each seed is enclosed in a soft, membranous, inflated bladder; these bladders overlap and resemble the fruit of hops. Hophornbeam wood is remarkably hard and strong—possibly a result of the tree's very slow growth.



9. Yellowwood—1881

Cladrastis kentuckea
13055*B

Yellowwood is native to the southeastern United States, but it is also hardy in Boston and farther north. The leaves emerge a bright yellowish-green, creating a splash of color in the spring landscape. They change to a vibrant green as the season progresses. Fragrant white flowers appear in late May, hanging in pendulous clusters. Freshly cut wood is yellow, hence the common name.



10. Kentucky Coffeetree—1873

Gymnocladus dioica

324*B

A native of North America, this deciduous tree has dark, scaly bark and small, broad leaflets. The coffeetree is a member of the pea family; its seeds are suspended in thick pods. The Kentucky coffeetree is prized for its bold branch and twig patterns that provide winter interest in the landscape. In fact, the name *Gymnocladus* is Greek for “naked twigs.”



11. Common Witchhazel—1883

Hamamelis virginiana

14693*D

The common name witchhazel testifies to the early colonists’ belief that the branches of this tree could be used as divining rods. One of the latest flowering plants in the Arboretum, common witchhazel bears its fragrant yellow flowers with their ribbon-like petals in October. The flowers possess the unusual ability to roll up their petals for protection from frost damage.



12. Cornelian Cherry—1883

Cornus mas

13126*A

In flower, the cornelian cherry bears little resemblance to its cousin, our native flowering dogwood, *Cornus florida*, but this import from Europe and Asia is just as beautiful. Its small yellow flowers appear in March and April, forming a fluffy, yellow cloud. The red, cherrylike fruits, which ripen in midsummer, can be used to make syrup and preserves, but be quick: birds love them and will eat them soon after they ripen.



13. Japanese Tree Lilac—1876

Syringa reticulata

1111*A

The Japanese tree lilac grows 25 to 30 feet in height. It extends the lilac season by flowering in mid-June, after the shrub lilacs. Its blossoms are creamy white, emitting a soft, sweet aroma like that of privet. This tree was planted from seeds imported from Japan and is the oldest lilac in the Arboretum’s collection.



14. Sassafras—1884

Sassafras albidum

968*A

This tree is unusual in that it has three different leaf shapes: three-lobed, mitten-shaped, and oval-shaped. Oil from the roots and root bark are used to make perfume, soap, and tea. The small yellow flowers that bloom in spring are not showy, but after pollination they mature into little, dark-blue fruits held on brilliant red stalks. The fruit is only present on the female plant. Sassafras is one of the best North American natives for fall color; its leaves range from yellow to deep orange, scarlet, and purple.



15. Japanese Spicebush—1892

Lindera obtusiloba var. *obtusiloba*

2602*A

The Japanese spicebush is an attractive, multistemmed shrub related to the sassafras. Its leaves also vary in shape, just like sassafras. Fall foliage is golden yellow, lasting about two weeks. Greenish-yellow flowers emerge in spring and make up in fragrance what they lack in showiness. Flowers are precocious, meaning they appear before the leaves. Small round fruits turn from red to black, maturing in early fall.



16. Sapphireberry—1897

Symplocos paniculata

17587-1*A

A native of China and Japan, the sapphireberry’s common name refers to its striking, bright blue fruits. The fruits mature in late summer to early fall, but don’t expect to see them for long. Birds will quickly devour them. Creamy white, fragrant flowers bloom in mid-June.



17. London Planetree—1891

Platanus x acerifolia

16595*B

A cross between our native sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) and the oriental planetree (*Platanus orientalis*), the London planetree should be planted only in open areas where it will have plenty of room to reach its mature size (70 to 100 feet tall and a canopy up to 120 feet wide). The peeling bark can range from olive green to creamy white, with an overall mottled effect.



18. Black Walnut—1874

Juglans nigra

1181*A

Native to North America, the black walnut is well known for its beautifully grained wood, which is prized in the furniture industry. It is the black walnut’s cousin, the English walnut (*Juglans regia*), that produces the shelled walnuts commonly seen on grocery store shelves, but black walnuts also are edible and are used in candies and ice cream.



125 Arborway
Boston, MA 02130-3500

