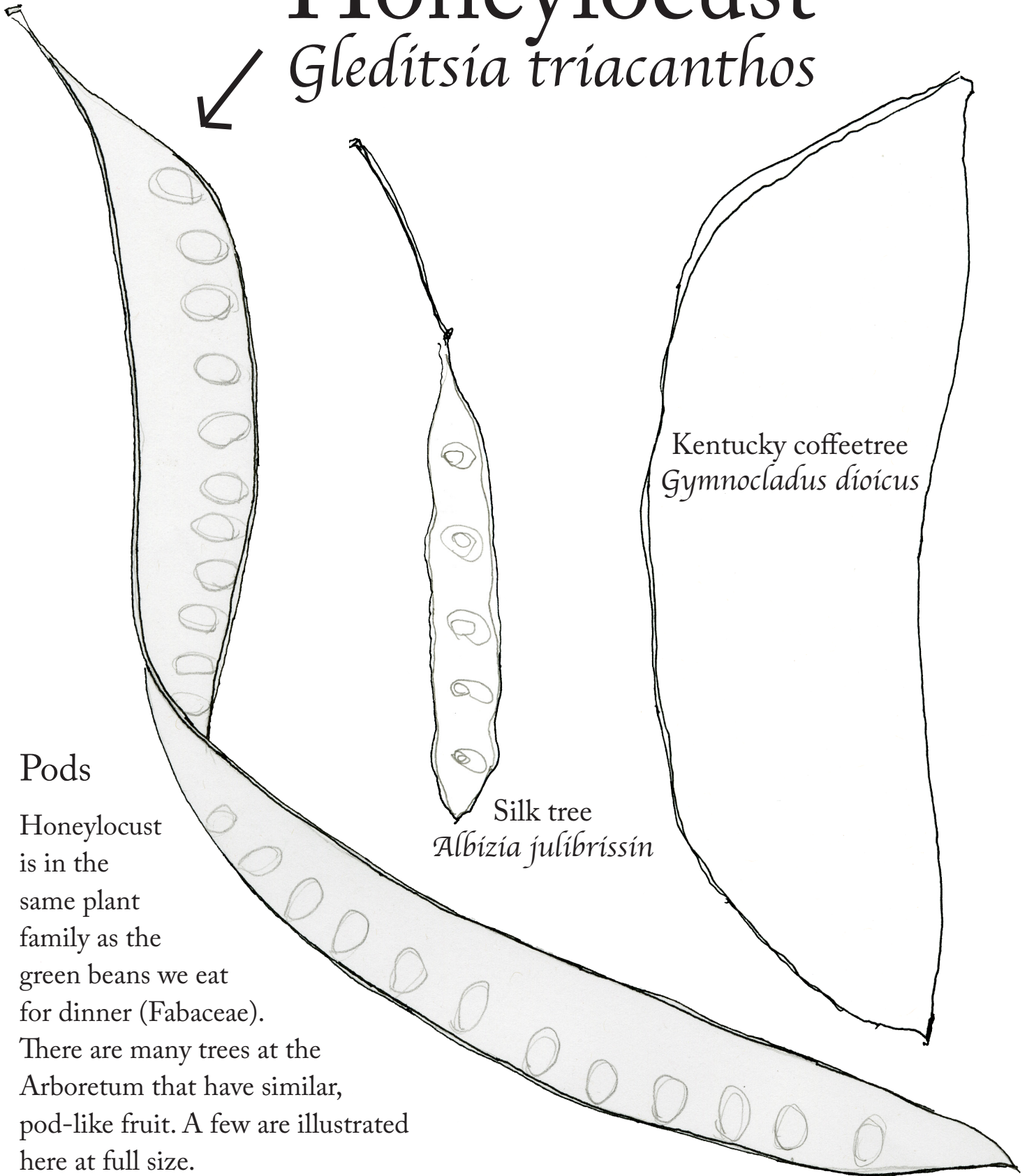


Honeylocust

Gleditsia triacanthos



Pods

Honeylocust is in the same plant family as the green beans we eat for dinner (Fabaceae).

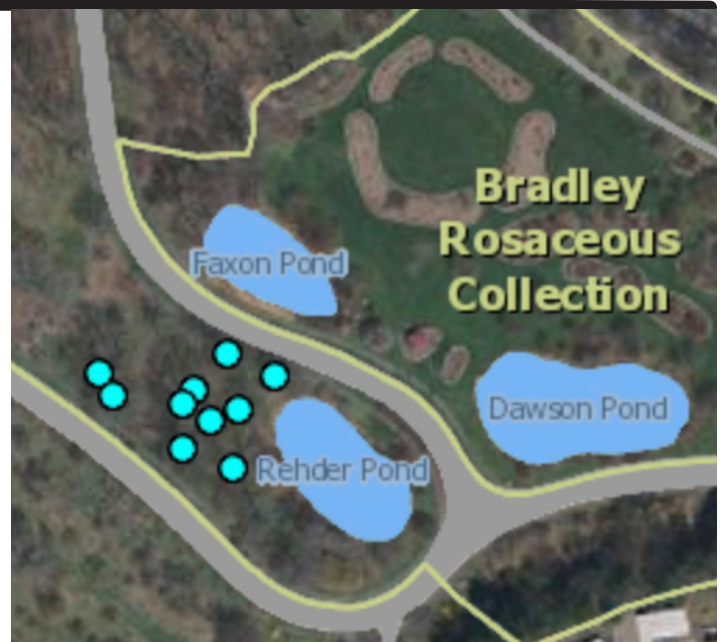
There are many trees at the Arboretum that have similar, pod-like fruit. A few are illustrated here at full size.

How many of these related trees you can find? How many pods can you find?

Can you find?

From the Hunnewell Visitor Center:

- Follow Meadow Road toward the ponds.
- After passing the cork trees on the right, start following the sidewalk that runs parallel to Meadow Road.
- When the sidewalk forks, there will be a Kentucky coffee tree in front of you. If you want to see the pods you have to look high up in the tree. Do you think there might be some old ones on the ground?



What's in a name?

The tree derives the name “honey” from the sweet, sticky pulp found in its pods. The “locust” in honeylocust can be traced back to the pods’ similarity in appearance to those on the the old world tree, carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*). The rattling pods of the carob tree suggested the noise made by the insect. When colonists noticed similar pods on the *Gleditsia*, they used the same name.

Pods

The seed pods of the honeylocust emerge green and turn brown as they ripen. They are eight to eighteen inches long, one inch wide, flat, twisted and resemble twisted leather straps. Unlike many legumes, the pods will persist on the tree until spring, unless winter storms or animals remove them. Humans don't eat these pods, but rabbits, deer, squirrels, crows, and northern bobwhite do.

Thorns

In the wild, honeylocusts grow in most of the eastern United States. The wild variety has one feature that is absent on cultivated varieties that we see around the city -- thorns. These sharp, modified branches can protrude from the trunk or the smaller branches. They are usually three to six inches but can be up to twelve inches long! Scientists think that thorns were protection against hungry prehistoric mammals such as mastodons and mammoths. Like most honeylocusts sold for landscaping, the trees that are planted around Boston are *Gleditsia tricanthos f. inermis* (thornless honeylocust). Nearly every honeylocust sold for landscape purposes is this thornless variety. In the wild, only a small percentage of honeylocusts have no thorns. Many of the cultivated honeylocusts are also fruitless.