Cladrastis kentukea - American Yellowwood (Fabaceae)

Cladrastis kentukea is a striking tree with long panicles of fragrant white flowers in June. American Yellowwood has bright green foliage that contrasts nicely with darker leaved trees and turns golden-yellow in autumn. It's an excellent small shade tree for smaller properties, as a single specimen or in groupings.

**FEATURES**

**Form**
m- medium to large ornamental/shade, deciduous tree
m- maturing at 40-50' tall x 20-50' wide
m- rounded vase, symmetrical form
m- often multi-trunked
m- medium to slow growth rate (less than 12” per year)

**Culture**

- full sun (best) to partial shade
- prefers moist, organic soils that drain well, but is adaptable to poor soils, dry soils, and soils of various pH; does not tolerate wet soils
- may be somewhat difficult to transplant
- Prune only in summer. Winter or spring pruning results in profuse bleeding. Proper pruning to avoid weak crotch angles is necessary. Unpruned trees tend to fall apart in 30-40 years.
- Pea Family with some susceptibility to Verticillium wilt and canker, but generally resistant to pests

**Foliage**

- odd-pinnately compound
- 2-4” long x half as wide
- usually 7-9 leaflets, each elliptic to ovate
- bright green, terminal leaflet largest
- petiole enlarged at base and enclosing bud
- foliage often turns copper to yellow in autumn

**Flowers**

- small (each about 1”)
- in pendulous clusters
- fragrant, white,
- flowers bloom in late spring
- highly ornamental

**Fruits**

- pods (legume)
- 3-5” long
- turn brown in autumn
- held late in the tree, giving winter effect

**Twigs**

- green becoming brown, smooth, lustrous, many small lenticels

**Trunk**

- smooth, gray to brown (like beech)
- freshly cut wood is bright yellow (dye was used in the past)
- branches initiate low to the ground

**USAGE**

**Function**

- accent or street tree, buffer strip, shade tree, reclamation
- use in lawn, park, golf course, residential

**Texture**

- medium texture in foliage and when bare
- moderate density in foliage and when bare

**Assets**

- fragrant flowers
- attractive floral display
- adapted to alkaline soils

**Liabilities**

- flowers attract bees
- susceptible to limb breakage (brittle wood and weak crotches)

**Habitat**

- Zones 4 to 8
- Native to Eastern U.S. in the Southern Appalachian Mountains where it grows in dry limestone outcroppings and stream banks

**SELECTIONS**

**Alternates**

- trees with showy or fragrant late spring inflorescences (e.g. Cercis canadensis 'Alba' (var. alba), Robinia pseudoacacia, etc.)

**Cultivars - Variants - Related species**

- 'Rosea' - A pink flowered form.