Halesia tetraptera (= H. carolina) - Carolina Silverbell
(Styracaceae)

Halesia tetraptera is a tree with prolific mid-spring white bell-shaped pendulous flowers that is best-sited in semi-shady locations with moist, rich soils.

FEATURES

Form
- medium-sized ornamental tree
- maturing at about 30’ tall x 20’ wide under urban conditions, but up to 60’ tall in the wild
- upright irregular growth habit (either single-trunked and low-branched, or multi-trunked, with ascending branches forming an irregular canopy that is highly variable from one tree to the next)
- medium growth rate

Culture
- full sun to partial shade
- prefers partial sun to partial shade in moist, acidic, well-drained, organically-enriched soils; it is not urban tolerant, especially to heat, drought, and poor soils, and may develop chlorotic foliage when placed in alkaline pH soils
- propagated by rooted stem cuttings or by seeds
- no serious diseases or pests
- moderately available, primarily in B&B form

Foliage
- medium green, alternate, ovate to elliptical, and serrulate
- autumn color is yellowish green to yellow-brown, and not at all ornamentally effective

Flowers
- white, in late Apr. or early May, as pendulous bell-shaped clusters of flowers on short pedicels from the previous year’s wood, with each flower consisting of 4 fused petals, with the flowers persistent for about a week
- very attractive when viewed from a short distance, but best viewed by looking up into the canopy or at eye-level to achieve the maximum ornamental effect, since they are pendulous, emerge with the foliage, and are therefore slightly hidden

Fruits
- lime green, distinctly four-winged, changing to brown, and usually abscising in autumn, but with a few fruits persistent into the following spring

Twigs
- tan and pubescent at the end of the first growing season, becoming darker brown then gray in the second year, developing stringy exfoliating filaments on the second- and third-year wood
- young branches remain smooth and brown-gray, with prominent darker striations

Trunk
- older branches and young trunks become furrowed, flat-ridged, and blocky, while mature trunks are more deeply fissured and dark gray, sometimes mottled with a lighter brown coloration

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Function
- specimen tree for the border, woodland edge, understory, or even foundation site, as long as the proper soil, moisture, and drainage conditions are met
- well suited as an accent tree near decks, patios

Texture
- medium texture in foliage and when bare
- average density in foliage and when bare

Assets
- white bell-shaped flowers in spring
- striated to furrowed gray-brown bark
- lime-green, four-sided fruits in late summer
- shade tolerant

Liabilities
- irregular and somewhat unpredictable in growth habit, although generally upright
- poor autumn color

Habitat
- Zones 4 to 8
- Native to the Eastern U.S. where it exists at the edges of woodlands

SELECTIONS

Alternates
- mid-spring flowering trees (Cornus florida, Crataegus viridis 'Winter King', Malus, etc.)
- small- to medium-sized trees with subtle stem/branch/bark ornamental character (Amelanchier laevis, Cornus florida, Crataegus viridis 'Winter King', etc.)
- native understory ornamental trees or large shrubs (Aesculus glabra, Amelanchier canadensis, Carpinus caroliniana, Cercis canadensis, Ostrya virginiana, Viburnum prunifolium, etc.)
- trees with oddly-shaped fruits (Asimina triloba, Carpinus betulus, Koelreuteria paniculata, Ostrya virginiana, Staphylea trifolia, etc.)

Cultivars - Variants - Related species
- straight species is the predominant form, although cultivars exist, including some with pinkish flowers