**Platanus occidentalis** - American Planetree or Sycamore  
(*Platanaceae*)

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*Platanus occidentalis* is a massive shade tree that is native to bottomlands of the Eastern U.S. Sycamore has ornamental, exfoliating bark in its middle and upper canopy, adaptability to wet or dry soils, and bold texture.

### FEATURES

**Form**
- large shade tree
- maturing at about 80' tall x 60' wide under urban conditions, but much larger in the wild
- upright pyramidal to upright oval growth habit in youth, becoming upright irregular and spreading with age
- rapid growth rate

**Culture**
- full sun to partial sun
- prefers moist, deep, rich soils in full sun, but is very adaptable to a wide variety of soils, including soils that are dry, wet, compacted, poor, and of various pH
- propagated by seeds and by rooted cuttings
- Planetree Family, with several minor disease and pest problems; however, anthracnose (*Gnomonia veneta*) is a serious disease that causes severe dieback of the emerging stems and foliage in afflicted trees in mid- to late-spring
- low availability, in B&B form

**Foliage**
- green-gray to medium green, alternate, 3- to 5-lobed with incised margins, about 6" long and slightly wider, having a truncate base with a 4" long petiole, and with an overall shape that resembles a large Sugar Maple leaf
- young leaves are pubescent on both the upper and lower surfaces turning glabrous and medium green by mid-summer
- the large, thick, wide foliage turns an unattractive brown-yellow to yellowish green color in autumn

**Twigs**
- gray-green, pubescent on first-year growth, and with alternating ovoid winter buds
- stems from the terminal leader, branch tips, or watersprouts are straight and very fast-growing, while those from older branches grow at a medium rate and are often semi-pendulous and zigzag
- large branches spread very wide with maturity and often arch downwards under their tremendous weight, and eventually become prone to lightning, wind, or ice storm damage over the long life of the tree

**Trunk**
- the white, cream, and olive-green interior bark is exposed on an annual basis as the tan-gray exterior bark exfoliates in rolled-up, tube-like sheets every mid-summer
- the brown-gray lower trunk is composed of small blocks and plates, and is not ornamental as compared to the lightly-colored exfoliating upper trunk and spreading branches of the canopy
- mature specimens can reach 3-6' in trunk diameter
- in spite of its very large size, Sycamore rarely has basal trunk flare or surface roots, unless it is improperly sited in a restricted root zone (such as when used as a street tree) or some of its roots are exposed due to erosion (such as at a stream embankment)

### USAGE

**Function**
- shade, specimen, or focal point tree in large open areas (it should not be used as a street tree, or as a shade tree for small lawns)

**Texture**
- bold texture in foliage and when bare
- average density in foliage and open when bare

**Assets**
- rapid growth and establishment
- exfoliating ornamental bark
- bold texture, especially in winter outline
- wet or dry site tolerant

**Liabilities**
- anthracnose is a serious potential cosmetic disease, causing defoliation in spring
- bark and stem litter
- prone to storm damage
- poor autumn color, with large leaves as leaf litter
- gets much too large for many urban sites

**Habitat**
- Zones 4 to 9
- Native to moist or wet bottomlands of the Eastern U.S.

**SELECTIONS**

**Alternates**
- trees with highly ornamental bark (*Acer griseum, Betula nigra, B. papyrifera, Carya ovata, Fagus sylvatica, Platanus x acerifolia*, etc.)
- very large shade trees (*Ailanthus altissima, Celtis occidentalis, Liriodendron tulipifera, Populus deltoides, Quercus macrocarpa, Quercus rubra*, etc.)
- large trees for continuously moist to wet sites (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica, Gleditsia triacanthos, Juglans nigra, Nyssa aquatica, Populus deltoides, Quercus palustris, Salix alba, Taxodium distichum*)

**Cultivars - Variants - Related species**
- the species is the only form available. See the closely-related London Planetree (*Platanus x acerifolia*)