**Platanus x acerifolia - London Planetree (Platanaceae)**

*Platanus x acerifolia* is a tree that can withstand the rigors of the urban environment including streets and parking lot islands. London Planetree has exfoliating bark and solid green summer color. It is a utilitarian tree.

**Features**

- **Form**
  - large tree
  - to 80' tall x 60' wide
  - upright pyramidal to upright oval in youth, becoming irregular and spreading with age
  - rapid rate

- **Culture**
  - prefers moist sites but is very adaptable to a variety of soils, compaction, and moisture conditions as well as restricted root space; considered quite tolerant to urban conditions, including air pollution
  - widely planted in Europe and becoming more popular in the U.S.
  - anthracnose (*Gnomonia veneta*) is a potentially serious disease that causes severe dieback of the emerging stems and foliage in afflicted trees in mid- to late-spring, and a resulting "witches' broom" of subsequent whorled stems that emerge in early summer; the London Planetree is believed to be more tolerant of anthracnose than the American Sycamore, but is susceptible to powdery mildew
  - widely available in B&B form

- **Foliage**
  - alternate 3- to 5-lobed, incised, pubescent, light green-gray
  - shape resembles a Sugar Maple leaf
  - autumn color brown-yellow to yellowish green; unattractive

- **Fruits**
  - monoecious, insignificant, in Apr.
  - tan furry balls, typically found in pairs
  - many fruits are winter persistent on 3" pendulous peduncles

- **Twigs**
  - gray-green

- **Trunk**
  - cream and green interior bark, tan-gray exterior exfoliating bark
  - green-brown-gray platy lower trunk
  - can get to 4" diameter

**Usage**

- shade, specimen, or focal point tree in open areas
- street and parking lot island tree

- **Function**
  - bold in foliage and when bare
  - average density in foliage and open density when bare
- **Assets**
  - wet or dry site tolerant
  - gray-green exfoliating ornamental bark on trunk and limbs
  - urban tolerant in general

**Liabilities**

- poor autumn color
- exfoliating bark litter, especially in mid-summer
- occasional storm damage
- canker stain is a serious fungal disease
- frost cracks on trunks
- may show leaf scorch in very dry summers
- lace bugs may cause premature defoliation, but do not harm the tree

**Habitat**

- Zone 4
- believed to be of hybrid origin involving a cross of American Sycamore (*P. occidentalis*) and Oriental Planetree (*P. orientalis*), which confers anthracnose resistance and pollution tolerance

**Selections**

- trees with ornamental bark
- large shade trees
- trees for wet sites

**Alternates**

- *P. occidentalis* - American Sycamore - native American bottomland tree (see its factsheet)

**Comparing the Sycamore and the Planetree**

- Although American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) and London Planetree (*Platanus acerifolia*) are often difficult to tell apart at first glance, the following features, especially in combination, can be used to differentiate between them:
  - London Planetree is now the preferred choice of nursery growers due to its relative anthracnose resistance, and is found much more often in an urban site where it has obviously been intentionally transplanted
  - Sycamore is native to Eastern North America and is a predominate tree found along streams, rivers, bottomlands, and neglected wastelands, while London Planetree rarely escapes to the wild
  - London Planetree has relatively smooth bark, with an inner bark that is primarily olive green, while Sycamore has a bark that strongly exfoliates in mid-summer to expose an interior bark that is a mottled combination of white, cream, green, and gray
  - London Planetree usually has its fruits borne as 2 per stalk, while Sycamore usually has its fruits borne as 1 per stalk
  - Sycamore is susceptible to leaf and stem anthracnose in spring, while London Planetree is prone to canker stain (a fungal disease of the bark and cambium) and frost cracks (originating as fissures of the bark and cambium in winter)
  - London Planetree is quite tolerant of poor soils and aerial pollution, whereas Sycamore prefers rich, deep, moist soils and no pollution
  - only London Planetree will develop many small knobs on its smooth trunk with maturity which are not associated with healed-over branch stubs, while both Sycamore and London Planetree may each have large knots on their trunks with maturity that represent sites of previous branch attachment

**Flowers**

- monoecious, insignificant, in Apr.

**Fruits**

- tan furry balls, typically found in pairs
- many fruits are winter persistent on 3" pendulous peduncles

**Exfoliating Bark**

- London Planetree has exfoliating bark, which is a distinctive feature of the tree. The bark peels away in thin, papery strips, revealing a greenish underbark. This characteristic makes London Planetree easily identifiable, especially from a distance. The exfoliation process continues throughout the tree's life, with new layers of bark developing as the tree grows in diameter. The exfoliating bark is not only a visual feature but also serves a functional purpose, as it helps to dissipate heat and protect the underlying layers of bark from damage. The bark of London Planetree is often compared to that of the American Sycamore, but London Planetree's exfoliation is more pronounced and frequent, particularly in the upper trunk, where the bark peels away in broader strips. This feature is particularly noticeable in older trees, where the exfoliation process has been ongoing for many years.