

## American Sycamore

*Platanus occidentalis*

### Secondary Names:

American Planetree, Buttonwood

**Leaf Type:** Deciduous

**Texas Native:** ☒ Yes ☐ No

**Firewise:** ☒ Yes ☐ No



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### Tree Description:

Considered the largest deciduous tree in North America, sycamore in Texas can exceed 100 feet in height and 4 feet in diameter, with a stout trunk and large, spreading limbs that create an oval or round, spreading crown.

### Range/Site Description:

Occurs along streams and on rich bottomlands throughout eastern Texas, along the major rivers of the Edwards Plateau, and southwest to Maverick County.

### Leaf:

Simple, alternate, 4" to 12" wide and about as long, palmately-veined with the 3 to 5 main veins ending at the tip of a wide lobe, leaf edge coarsely-toothed between the lobes; leaves are bright green and smooth above, paler and pubescent below, turning brown in the fall. The base of the petiole is hollow and covers the winter bud.

### Flower:

Male and female flowers borne separately on the same tree as 0.5" round clusters on short stalks.

### Fruit:

A spherical ball about 1" in diameter, attached to a flexible stalk 3" to 5" long. During early spring the fruit balls break up into the individual nutlets, which have long hairs that help scatter them by wind or water.

### Bark:

The bark on the younger trunk and large limbs is smooth and greenish-gray or white in color; as the tree ages, the outer bark of limbs and trunk flakes off in irregular, brown patches and exposes the nearly white younger bark beneath.

### Wood:

Hard and moderately strong, but decays rapidly in the ground. Has been used for butcher blocks, rolling pins, crates, and tobacco boxes. Also used as a landscape tree.

### Similar Species:

Mexican sycamore (*Platanus mexicana*) has leaves with fewer teeth and silvery undersides that is sometimes planted as an ornamental in the drier portions of Texas.

### Interesting Facts:

A hybrid of sycamore -- the London planetree (*Platanus x acerifolia*) -- has been widely planted throughout the eastern U.S. as a street tree and can be distinguished from the native species by having 2 or even 3 round fruits on a single fruit stalk.