

Eastern Cottonwood

Populus deltoides ssp. deltoides

Leaf Type: Deciduous

Texas Native: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Firewise: ☒ Yes ☐ No



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Tree Description:

A large tree to 100 feet tall and a stout trunk to 6 feet or more in diameter, with thick, heavy branches that form a rounded, spreading crown.

Range/Site Description:

Occurs along streambanks, riverbottoms, and sandbars in East and Central Texas. Also planted as a fast-growing shade tree on rural homesteads.

Leaf:

Simple, alternate, leaf blade 3" to 5" long and across, triangular in shape, on a flattened petiole 2" to 3" long; pointed at the tip, square at the base or slightly heart-shaped, and coarsely toothed on the margin; shiny and medium green on top, lighter beneath. The flat petiole makes the leaves twist and shimmer even in a light breeze.

Flower:

Male and female flowers borne on separate trees before the leaves emerge; male catkins 2" long, female catkins 3" to 3.5" long, in loose clusters.

Fruit:

A long string of capsules, 8" to 12" long, ripening in early summer, each containing several seeds with white silky hairs which permit the winds to carry them for long distances.

Bark:

Thin, smooth, green to yellowish on twigs and young branches, turning brown with age; older branches and trunks are gray or brown, with thick, flattened ridges and deep furrows.

Wood:

The light-colored wood is soft, light, and warps easily upon drying, but is used for boxes, paper pulp, veneer, and pallets.

Similar Species:

Rio Grande cottonwood (*Populus deltoides ssp. wislizeni*) reach immense size in West Texas; quaking aspen (*P. tremuloides*) occurs only in the highest mountains of West Texas; Lombardy poplar (*P. nigra*) has a distinct 'columnar' form.

Interesting Facts:

The sight of cottonwoods in the distance was a sure sign of water to early settlers during their travels west. Borrowing the Spanish word for 'cottonwood,' the Mission San Antonio de Valero is commonly known as 'The Alamo' because of the presence of nearby cottonwood trees.