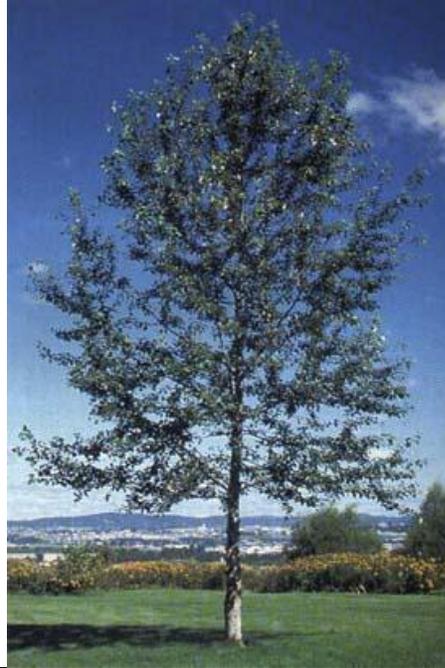


Balsam Poplar
Populus balsamifera



Identification:

Leaves: alternate, simple, ovate, finely serrated, shiny dark green, paler and often blotchy orange below, leaf stalk (petiole) long with glands at the leaf base.

Flowers: dioecious, male and female as hanging, long pale yellow green catkins, appearing in May.

Fruit: small, 2-valved, dry capsule containing numerous small seeds. Capsules are a lustrous green during development but turn dull green at time of dispersal. Male flowers are shed promptly and decay; female catkins are shed shortly after dispersal is completed but remain identifiable for the remainder of the summer.

Bark: greenish- brown when young, becoming gray and deep furrowed with age.

Wood: wood is light, soft, and low in strength, grayish white to light grayish brown in colour.

Distribution/Location: Alaska to Labrador and Newfoundland.

Habitat: Found most often in river valleys; also on any moist, rich, low-lying ground, grows in pure stands or mixed with balsam fir, black spruce, white spruce and white birch.

Growing Characteristics: Medium- sized trees, up to 25m high, 50cm in diameter, and 70 years old, occasionally much larger and older. Often the largest tree in the northern and west parts of its range.

Reproduction:

- Seed production begins at about 8 years, with a good crop every year.
- Dispersal by wind before leaves completely emerge; within 200m of the parent tree.
- Germination: Seeds remain viable 2-4 weeks but will germinate immediately following arrival on a suitable seedbed of exposed, moist mineral soil. Seedlings require 1 month of abundant moisture to survive.
- Vegetative reproduction from root suckers, stump sprouts, stems sprouts, and buried branches.

Uses: Traditional – Burns well and was used to make friction fire sets. Ashes were used to make a cleanser for hair and buckskin clothing.

The Thompson people produced soap from the inner bark. The Hudson’s Bay Company reportedly continued using their method of combining the inner bark with tallow.

Native Americans used resin from buds to treat sore throats, coughs, lung pain and rheumatism. An ointment, Balm of Gilead, was made from the winter buds to relieve congestion.

Modern- Buds contain a waxy resin with disinfectant properties still used in some modern natural health ointments. Bees collect resin and use it to seal off intruders, such as mice, which might decay and infect the hive.

Balsam poplar is used for pulpwood, lumber and veneer, and high-grade paper and particle board. Also used to make boxes and crates. The short, fine fibres are used in tissues and other paper products.



Fun facts:

Squeeze the buds between your fingers to see how sticky they are. Then smell the balsam fragrance.

Bibliography: *Trees in Canada* by John Laird Farrar page 340-341.

<http://www.borealforest.org/trees/tree11.htm>

http://www.domtar.com/arbre/english/album_photo/p_pbaul.htm

<http://www.abtreegene.com/trees.html>

<http://www.rook.org/earl/bwca/nature/trees/populusbal.html>