

FACT SHEET – American White Ash

Issue 1

Fraxinus americana (White Ash or American Ash) - is a species of *Fraxinus* native to eastern North America found in mesophytic hardwood forests from Nova Scotia west to Minnesota, south to northern Florida, and southwest to eastern Texas.



Growth

It is a large deciduous tree growing to 20–30m tall, exceptionally to 50m, with a trunk 0.5–1.8 m diameter. The bark is smooth and gray on young trees, becoming fissured with age. The winter buds are dark brown or reddish-brown, with a velvety texture. The leaves are 20-30 cm long. They are green above, whitish glaucous below, and turn yellow, red, or purple in the autumn. The flowers are small, purplish, without petals; like all ashes, is usually dioecious, with male and female flowers being borne on separate trees. Flowering occurs in early spring after 30-55 growing degree days, before the new leaves expand; pollination is by wind. The fruit is a samara 2.5-6.5cm long and 4–7 mm broad when fully formed, the seed 1.5-2 cm long with a pale brown wing 1.5-4 cm long, and can be blown a good distance from the parent tree. The lifespan is up to a maximum of about 300 years.

Characteristics

The name White Ash derives from the glaucous undersides of the leaves. It is similar in appearance to the Green Ash, making identification difficult. The lower sides of the leaves of White Ash are lighter in colour than their upper sides, and the outer surface of the twigs of White Ash may be flaky or peeling. Green Ash leaves are similar in colour on upper and lower sides, and twigs are smoother. Also, these species tend to occupy different habitat niches, with White Ash found in moist upland sites and Green Ash in wet forests of floodplains or swamps, although there is some overlap in habitat distribution.

Cultivation and uses

The wood is white, quite dense, strong, and straight-grained. It is the timber of choice for production of snooker cues, baseball bats and tool handles. The wood is also favourable for furniture and flooring. Woodworkers use the timber mainly for internal uses due to high perish ability in contact with ground soil. It is also used to make lobster traps. Recently, it has also become a popular choice for solid-body electric guitar wood as well. It makes a very serviceable longbow if properly worked. Lastly, it was used in ceiling fan blades during the 70s and early to mid 80s though cane was sometimes simulated with plastic then. It is no longer used for ceiling fan blades in most countries. It is one of the most used trees for everyday purposes and, to keep up with high demand, is cultivated almost everywhere it can be. The tree seeds every 11 years. Are very easy to plant and cultivate, with a survival rate of 30%. It is widely grown as an ornamental tree in North America as well. Cultivars selected for superior fall colour include 'Autumn Applause' and 'Autumn Purple'. Other names occasionally used for the species include Biltmore ash, Biltmore white ash and cane ash.