



TREES & plants

Tulip-tree

The tulip-tree is one of the largest native trees in North America. It is a member of the magnolia family and has distinct tulip-shaped characteristic in its leaves, flowers, and fruit. The showy, goblet-shaped, orange-yellow-green flowers appear in late spring after the leaves; the cone-like seed clusters sit upright on the branches. The golden-yellow fall color of the tulip-tree makes this an excellent choice for large landscapes.

This species is native to the Chicago region according to Swink and Wilhelm's *Plants of the Chicago Region*, with updates made according to current research.

This plant has some cultivated varieties. [Go to list of cultivars.](#)



Botanical name: *Liriodendron tulipifera*

All Common Names: tulip-tree, tulip poplar, yellow poplar, tulip-poplar, tuliptree, tulip tree

Family (English): Magnolia

Family (Botanic): Magnoliaceae

Planting Site: Residential and parks, City parkway, Wide median

Tree or Plant Type: Tree

Foliage: Deciduous (seasonally loses leaves)

Native Locale: Chicago area, Illinois, North America

Landscape Uses: Parkway/street, Shade tree, Specimen

Size Range: Large tree (more than 40 feet)

Mature Height: 70-90 feet

Mature Width: 35-50 feet

Light Exposure: Full sun (6 hrs direct light daily), Partial sun/shade (4-6 hrs light daily)

Hardiness Zones: Zone 5 (Chicago), Zone 6, Zone 7, Zone 8, Zone 9

Soil Preference: Acid soil, Moist, well-drained soil

Acid Soils: Tolerant

Alkaline Soils: Moderately Tolerant

Salt Spray: Intolerant

Soil Salt: Intolerant

Drought Conditions: Intolerant

Poor Drainage: Intolerant

Planting Considerations: Highly susceptible to ice damage, Marginally hardy, Weak wood and branch structure

Ornamental Interest: Fall color, Showy flowers

Season of Interest: Late spring, Early summer, Mid fall, Late fall

Flower Color & Fragrance: Orange, Yellow

Shape or Form: Oval, Pyramidal, Round, Upright

Growth Rate: Fast

Transplants Well: Yes

Wildlife: Insect pollinators, Sapsuckers, Small mammals, Songbirds

More Information:

Tree & Plant Care

Tulip-tree prefers moist, well-drained, slightly acidic soils. Tolerant of more alkaline soil.

As with all members of the Magnolia family, tulip-tree's fleshy root system prefers being transplanted in early spring, rather than autumn.

A consistent supply of moisture is necessary; tree will suffer from leaf yellowing when planted in a dry site.

Disease, pests, and problems

Aphids, scales, mildew, canker, and verticillium wilt are possible problems.

Fast growth rate causes the tree to be somewhat weak wooded.

Tulip-tree is tolerant of black walnut toxicity.

Native geographic location and habitat

C-Value: 5

Native throughout most of eastern United States.

Bark color and texture

Mature trees have a gray-brown trunk with deeply furrowed fissures.

Young trees have smooth, gray bark with white shallow fissures.

Leaf or needle arrangement, size, shape, texture, and color

Alternate, simple, 3 to 8 inch long with a unique 4-lobed, flat-topped leaf.

Leaves are glossy green above with a pale green underside, changing to golden yellow in the fall.

Distinct, 1/2 inch long reddish-brown buds are said to resemble a duck's bill.

Flower arrangement, shape, and size

Attractive, 2 inch tall, tulip-like flowers are yellow-green, with an orange band at the base of each petal. Often obscured by leaves at the tips of branches.

Fruit, cone, nut, and seed descriptions

A 2 inch long, cone-shaped, aggregate of samaras (winged seeds). The seeds sit upright in pyramidal clusters, turning brown in October and persisting through winter.

Cultivars and their differences

These cultivars may be difficult to find.

Emerald City® tulip-tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera* 'JFS-Oz'): Darker green foliage than the species; turns a clear yellow in fall.

Upright, oval from growing 55 feet high and 25 feet wide.

Little Volunteer tulip-tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera* 'Little Volunteer'): A dwarf cultivar, growing 30 to 35 feet high (about 1/3 the size of the species) and 18 to 20 feet wide. The leaves are also smaller than those of the species.

Upright tulip-tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera* 'Arnold' or 'Fastigiatum'): A narrow form with upright branching; grows 50 feet high and 15 feet wide.

