

Beech, American *Fagus grandifolia*



A very formal and stately tree. Leaves emerge in late spring, changing from shimmering green to lustrous dark green to golden bronze in the fall. Smooth bark. Plant in well-drained, aerated soil. Can be used as a hedge. Grows to 50'-70' with a 40' spread. (Zones 4-9).

Attributes:

The American Beech tree is worth saving if it occurs on your property and one worth planting if you can meet its needs, including giving it plenty of space. Longevity compensates for its slow growth and a dense green canopy that changes to yellow-brown in autumn is reward for catering to its demanding nature. Throughout the eastern half of the United States, where this species occurs naturally, the four tiny nuts in each spiny bur are prized by a wide range of birds and mammals, including discerning humans.

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Wildlife Value:

Beechnuts are eaten by birds and mammals and are important food for chipmunks and squirrels.

History/Lore/Use:

A sturdy, densely canopied tree, the American Beech was a sign of fertile soil to early settlers and was quickly removed so the plow could take over and farming for food could commence. In hilly locations, it was the home for migrating Passenger Pigeons who were so numerous that they broke off the limbs of the trees from the sheer weight of their numbers when they perched on them. There was a Beech tree on the old stage road between Blountsville and Jonesboro, Tennessee that had an inscription carved into the trunk that read "D. Boone Cilled A Bar On Tree In Year 1760." The tree fell in 1916 and had a girth of 28-1/2 feet. The Forest Service estimated the tree's age to be 365 years, fully two centuries old before Daniel Boone inscribed it.

Moisture:

Well drained. The tree is very drought sensitive.

Leaves:

The leaves from this tree are 3 to 6 inches long, alternately arranged and marked with parallel veins that lead to sharp, incurved teeth on the margins. Glossy green color changing to copper in autumn.

Flower Color:

Light brown and pale.

Bloom Time:

April-May.

Fruit Description:

The fruit is oval, 1/2 to 1 inch in diameter, hard, brown, attractive to wildlife.