

# Maine Tree Species Fact Sheet

**Common Name:** American Basswood (Linden, Whitewood)

**Botanical Name:** *Tilia americana*

**Tree Type:** Deciduous

## **Physical Description:**

**Growth Habit:** American basswood is a large, rapidly growing tree. It does best in deep moist soils. The leaves are simple, alternate, heart-shaped, 5-10 inches long, sharp-pointed and coarsely serrate along the margin. They are dark green in color above and light green beneath. The twigs are rather slender, smooth, zigzag, bright red or greenish in color or covered by a gray skin.

**Height:** American basswood reaches a height of 50-70 feet and has a trunk diameter of 2-3 feet.

**Shape:** American basswood is a tall, stately tree with numerous, slender, low hung, spreading branches. At maturity the lower branches droop down then up forming a deep oblong or somewhat rounded crown.

## **Fruit/Seed Description/Dispersal Methods:**

The flowers are perfect, pale yellow and fragrant, borne in pendulous cymes in mid to late June. The fruit is a round, woody nut about the size of a pea. It is borne singly or in clusters with a common stalk, attached midway to a leafy bract, which acts as a sail to scatter the seed. Animals also disperse seeds. The fruit ripens in late fall but sometimes remains on the tree into the winter.

## **Range within Maine:**

American basswood occurs as scattered specimens throughout the state. This tree is hardy to Zone 3b.

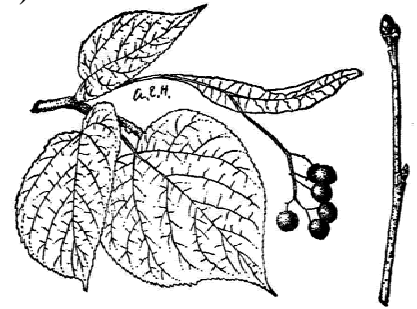
## **Distinguishing Features:**

American basswood is often found in clumps; has a large heart-shaped leaf; hump-backed buds on zigzag twigs; and a pea-like nut attached to a slender “parachute.”

## **Interesting Features:**

Bees make honey from the flowers and it is known as the “bee-tree.” The young fruit and flowers ground into a paste make an excellent substitute for chocolate.

Basswood has relatively soft wood that is valued for hand carving, boxes, veneer, and paper pulp. It is often used as a substitute for white pine. The inner bark, or bast, can be used as a source of fiber for making rope or for weaving baskets and mats.



## **Relationship to Wildlife:**

Mice, squirrels and chipmunks eat basswood seeds. Rabbits also feed heavily on seedlings and small saplings.

## **Landscape Use:**

American basswood is commonly planted along many city streets. Because of its large size, this species is not ideal for the home landscape. It is better suited for parks, golf courses and other large areas.

## **Common Problems or Pests of the Tree in Maine:**

Many different insects (including linden borer, Japanese beetle, basswood leaf miner, mites, scale, elm sawfly, thrips, cankerworms and gypsy moths) attack basswood, but few serious insect problems exist. The foliage is host to various diseases including anthracnose, black mold and leaf spot, but none seem to do serious damage. The wood of this species decays easily and once exposed can be host to many of the common hardwood decay organisms such as yellow cap fungi and cankers.

## **References:**

*Forest Trees of Maine, Twelfth Edition.* Maine Forest Service/Department of Conservation. 1995.

*Know Your Trees.* Cope, J.A. and Fred E. Winch, Jr. Cornell Cooperative Extension. 1992.

*Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition.* Dirr, Michael A. Publishing L.L.C. 1998.

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