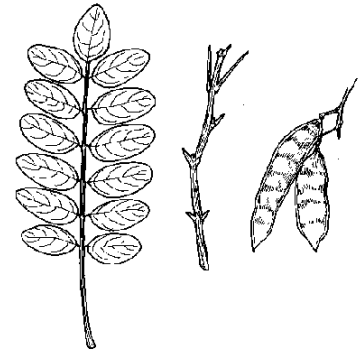


Maine Tree Species Fact Sheet

Common Name: Black Locust (Yellow Locust)

Botanical Name: *Robinia pseudoacacia*

Tree Type: Deciduous



Physical Description:

Growth Habit: Black locust is a rapidly growing tree that grows naturally on a wide range of sites but does best on rich moist limestone soils. It has the ability to fix nitrogen and in this way partially creates its own nitrogen supply. The branches are small, brittle, occasionally multi-angled, and when young have short stiff spines in pairs at the base of leaves. It is one of the last trees to send out foliage in the spring. The bark is rough, yellowish brown in color becoming deeply furrowed into distinct, thick, rounded ridges, which are not scaly. The leaves are alternate, compound, from 8 to 14 inches long, with 7 to 19 entire leaflets arranged along a central stem. The leaflets are usually odd in number, short-stalked, oval in shape and from 1 1/2 to 2 inches long.

Height: Black locust reaches a height of about 50 feet and a trunk diameter of 8-20 inches.

Shape: Black locust is often an upright tree with a straight trunk and a narrow oblong crown, which becomes ragged and scraggly with age. It will develop thickets as it freely seeds, and develops shoots from roots. Some forms of this tree have a spreading habit with several trunks.

Fruit/Seed Description/Dispersal Methods:

The fragrant, whitish flowers, borne in showy racemes, appear after leaf emergence. The perfect flowers originate in the axils of the current year's leaves and are pollinated by insects, primarily bees. The fruit is a flattened, oblong, 2-4 inch, smooth brown-black pod that ripens in the fall and contains 1-8 beanlike seeds. The fruit opens on the tree and seeds are dispersed from September to April. Black locust begins seed production at about six years of age.

Range within Maine:

Black locust is not a native to the state of Maine, but it is extensively planted. It is abundant in some localities and is found mostly near dwellings or on abandoned farmlands, where it often becomes naturalized. This tree is hardy in Zones 4-8.

Distinguishing Features:

The black locust has compound leaves with oval leaflets and small downy buds that are depressed in the bark. It also has short stiff spines and papery seed pods.

Interesting Features:

Although black locust is not an important timber tree in the United States, it is used for a wide variety of products and is planted for many specialized purposes. The wood is heavy close-grained, strong and very durable. It is used for fence posts, poles, railroad ties, ship timber, tree nails for wooden ship construction, boxes, crates and stakes. It is said by some native New Englanders to last “3 years longer than a stone wall.”

The flowers are exceedingly fragrant and the bees produce honey from them.

Relationship to Wildlife:

Black locust provides cover for wildlife, browse for deer, and cavities for birds.

Landscape Use:

Black locust is not recommended for home landscapes. It is a good tree for highway cuts and fills, sandy and poor soils. It is a species that can survive in the toughest of conditions.

Common Problems or Pests of the Tree in Maine:

Canker, dampening-off, leaf spots, powdery mildews, wood decay, witches’ broom, locust borer, carpetworm, locust leaf miner, locust twig borer, and scales affect Black locust. The most destructive pest is the locust borer, which can riddle whole trees.

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