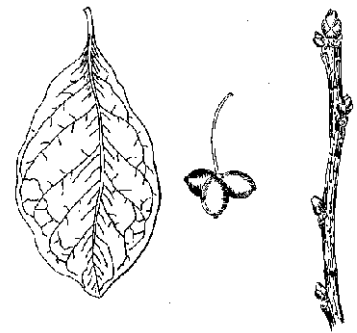


# Maine Tree Species Fact Sheet

**Common Name:** **Black Tupelo** (Black Gum, Sour Gum, Pepperidge and Tupelo Gum)

**Botanical Name:** *Nyssa sylvatica*

**Tree Type:** Deciduous



## **Physical Description:**

**Growth Habit:** Black tupelo is a large shade tree. It prefers evenly moist, deep acidic soils in full sun, but is somewhat adaptable to either wet or dry soils. It is difficult to transplant because of its taproot. The leaves are alternate, obovate to elliptic and lustrous dark green in the summer. They are 3 to 6 inches long and 1 1/2 to 3 inches wide, entire or remotely toothed. Fall foliage is a mixture of scarlet, purple, orange, yellow and green. The bark on young trees is smooth, grayish and flaky. On older trees, the bark is dark gray to almost black and broken into thick, irregular ridges which are checked across into short segments, giving it a block-like or alligator hide appearance. Branches become densely twiggy with age and have numerous spur shoots.

**Height:** Black tupelo reaches a height of 30 to 50 feet with a spread of 20 to 30 feet. This species is hardy in zones 4-9.

**Shape:** Black tupelo is a large shade tree that is somewhat pyramidal when young with densely set branches. In older trees the spreading and often horizontal branches form and irregularly rounded or flat-topped crown.

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

Black tupelo is polygamo-dioecious (having male and female flowers on separate plants, but these plants having perfect flowers as well). The flowers are small, greenish-white borne in peduncled clusters. They are insignificant and appear in May. The fruits are bluish-black, small and oblong. They mature in September and October. Birds primarily disperse the seeds.

## **Range within Maine:**

This species is found in very wet areas in Sagadahoc, Cumberland, Androscoggin, southern Oxford, Kennebec and York Counties.

## **Distinguishing Features:**

Distinguishing features of the black tupelo include the consistently spectacular fall color; blocky ornamental mature bark; and horizontal branching and flat-topped crown with age.

## **Interesting Features:**

The wood of the black tupelo is heavy, fine-grained, very tough, but not durable. It is used mainly for pulp.

Black tupelo is also a good honey tree.

## **Relationship to Wildlife:**

Many birds and animals eat the fruit and deer eat the young sprouts. Because this species tends to have cavities, many birds and animals use it for nesting.

## **Landscape Use:**

Black tupelo is excellent as a specimen tree and in naturalized areas. It is also a good tree for streets in residential areas, rather than heavily polluted areas.

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

Cankers, leaf spots, rust, tupelo leaf miner and scale attack this species. Black tupelo is also often affected by fire, particularly if it is growing on a dry site.

## **References:**

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

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

*United States Dept. of Agriculture: Silvics of North America*  
[http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfp/pubs/silvics\\_manual/volume\\_2/nyssa/silvatica.htm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfp/pubs/silvics_manual/volume_2/nyssa/silvatica.htm)

*Plant Dictionary: The Ohio State University*  
[http://www.hcs.ohio-state.edu/hcs/TMI/Plantlist/ny\\_atica.html](http://www.hcs.ohio-state.edu/hcs/TMI/Plantlist/ny_atica.html)

