

Maine Tree Species Fact Sheet

Common Name: Eastern Hophornbeam (Ironwood)

Botanical Name: *Ostrya virginiana*

Tree Type: Deciduous

Physical Description:

Growth Habit: Hophornbeam is a fairly rapid grower, especially in good soil. It grows on slopes and ridges having a dry, gravelly soil and is often found in the shade of other species. The leaves are similar to the leaves of yellow birch. They are 2-5 inches long, 1-2 inches wide, with an ovate or elliptical shape (egg-shape). Leaf edges are sharply saw-toothed. Leaves have many straight parallel side veins with short, hairy leafstalks. Dull yellow-green and nearly hairless above, leaves are paler with hairy veins beneath. The leaves turn bright yellow in fall. The bark is gray, separates easily into thin narrow scales, becoming finer and stringy on older trees.

Height: The hophornbeam can reach a height of 20–30' with a trunk diameter of 6-10".

Shape: The hophornbeam is a small tree with an open, rounded crown. The branches are slender and spreading, with the ends slightly drooping.

Fruit/Seed Description/Dispersal Methods:

The hophornbeam flowers in early spring just as the leaf buds are appearing. Male flowers consist of 1-3 drooping green catkins, 1 ½ – 2 ½ inches long. Female flowers are redder and shorter than the male's, only ½ – ¾ inches long. The fruit of the hophornbeam ripens in September. It is the fruit's resemblance to that of the hops vines which gives the tree its name. The fruit is 1 ½ – 2 inches long and ¾ – 1 inch wide. The light brown, cone-like hanging clusters are composed of many small, flattened, egg-shaped brown nutlets.

Range within Maine:

The hophornbeam thrives throughout Maine in the moist under story of hardwood forests, and on slopes and ridges with dry, gravelly soil. It needs sun or semi-shade and fertile, well-drained soil. The hop hornbeam tolerates drought quite well, but does not tolerate salt. This tree is hardy to Zone 3.

Distinguishing Features:

Saw-toothed, ovate leaves with parallel veins. Light brown to gray bark forms long narrow scales. Fruit clusters resemble that of the hops vine.

Interesting Facts:

The name "hophornbeam" refers to the fruit's resemblance to that of the hops vine, a major ingredient of beer. The tree is also called *ironwood* for its heavy, hard, and strong wood, and is traditionally used to make tool handles and fenceposts.



Relationship to Wildlife:

Bobwhites, pheasants, grouse, deer, and rabbits eat the fruit of the hophornbeam.

Landscape Use:

The hophornbeam is a nice small to medium carefree tree once established, for lawns, parks, campuses and municipalities.

References:

The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Trees, Eastern Region. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1993.

Forest Trees of Maine, 12th Edition. Maine Forest Service, Department of Conservation, 1995.

Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, 5th Edition. Dirr, Michael A., Stipes Publishing, Champaign. 1998.

Trees of North America. Brockman, C. Frank. Golden Press, Racine. 1968.



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