

Maine Tree Species Fact Sheet

Common Name: Slippery Elm (Red Elm)

Botanical Name: *Ulmus rubra*

Tree Type: Deciduous

Physical Description:

Growth Habit: Slippery elm is a medium-sized tree of moderately fast growth that may live to be 200 hundred years old. It grows best on moist, rich soils of lower slopes and flood plains. The bark is thick; dark brown tinged with red, divided by shallow fissures into flat ridges and covered with flat scales. The inner bark is sticky when chewed. The twigs are light gray in color, hairy, and somewhat rough. The alternate, simple, elliptical and long-pointed leaves have doubly serrate margins and are 5-7 inches long. They are thick, rough, and dark green in color. The undersides of the leaves are paler with white hairs and have a prominent midrib and parallel veins.

Height: Slippery elm grows to a height of 50 feet and has an average trunk diameter of 2 feet.

Shape: Slippery elm is an open-branched tree.

Fruit/Seed Description/Dispersal Methods:

Slippery elm has inconspicuous, perfect flowers that appear in the spring before the leaves. The seeds are small, flattened and winged. They ripen from April to June and are dispersed by the wind as soon as they are ripe.

Range within Maine:

Slippery elm is extremely rare in the state. It does however; occur naturally in scattered locations in York and Franklin Counties. This species is hardy to Zone 3.

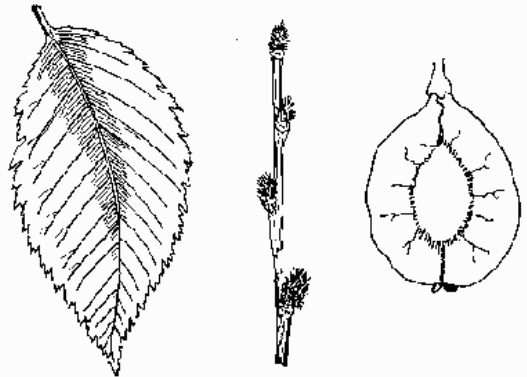
Distinguishing Features:

The inner bark and twigs are chewy. The buds are tipped with rusty hairs.

Interesting Features:

The name “slippery” developed because of the mucilaginous inner bark, which was chewed by pioneers to quench thirst. Today, the inner bark is used for medicinal purposes.

The wood is heavy, strong and durable and used for furniture, paneling, fence posts, barrel staves, and containers. It is considered inferior to American elm.



Relationship to Wildlife:

Birds and small animals eat the seeds. Deer and rabbits browse the twigs.

Landscape Use:

The ornamental value of slippery elm is limited and this species becomes a weed, as it tends to infest unkempt shrub borders, hedges and fencerows.

Common Problems or Pests of the Tree in Maine:

Slippery elm is susceptible to Dutch elm disease but not the extent that the American elm is. The species is also attacked by a variety of bark beetles, woodborers, cankerworms, aphids and the elm sawfly.

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