



## American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis* L.)

Also known as “buttonwood” or the  
“American Plane Tree”

**Location:** Found throughout the entire state of North Carolina but is most abundant and grows to its largest size along streams and on rich bottomlands.

**Bark:** The American Sycamore has multicolored, mottled bark. On young branches the bark is brownish and as the tree matures, the outer bark peels away in irregular patches to expose the smooth inner bark which may be green or olive but most often white. In mature trees, the bark on the lower trunk is entirely brown and consists of small scales.

**Leaves:** 4 to 7 inches long and broad, with palmate veining and toothed edges. They are usually three- to four-lobed and are divided by broad, shallow sinuses.

**Fruit:** It is about a 1 inch ball in diameter that breaks up when ripe to disperse small, elongated seeds surrounded by many fine hairs which permit them to be carried afar on the wind.

**Wood Type:** Hardwood. It is hard and moderately strong but decays rapidly in the ground.

**Mature Height:** Grows quickly to 80 to 110 feet (sometimes to 150 feet on preferred fertile sites)

**Mature Diameter:** 3 to 8 feet (sometimes 10 feet or more on preferred fertile sites). It is considered to be one of the largest hardwood trees in North America – especially in diameter.

**Uses:** Chopping blocks, tobacco boxes, furniture, interior finish and products such as chip board and flake board.

**Reference:** Holmes, J. S., & Holmes, J. S. (2015). *Common forest trees of North Carolina: A pocket manual*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Forest Service.