

SUNNYSIDE THYMES

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Know Your Natives

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Native Trees, Part 2 of 2

Here are three useful trees native to Southern Indiana:

OHIO BUCKEYE, *Aesculus glabra*, grows in zones 3 to 7 in medium well-drained soils and typically occurs in rocky wooded areas of valleys, ravines, bluff bases, slopes and thickets. Its bright green palmate compound poisonous leaves emerge in spring and mature to dark green by summer. Fall color is usually yellow. The greenish-yellow fragrant flowers appear in clusters by mid-spring and then are followed by the familiar fruit encased in a leathery brown partitioned husk covered with warty spines. When ripe, each buckeye fruit turns a shiny mahogany brown.



These buckeyes have been carried since colonial times by schoolchildren and adults as good luck charms. Those in Ohio know it as their state tree. Native Americans called it the 'hetuck', meaning the eye of the buck (deer). Though the tree attracts hummingbirds and butterflies, all parts of it emit an unpleasant odor when bruised, so care for your good luck charm.

Although it is a small to medium-sized deciduous tree with a broad oval-rounded crown, it is not recommended as a street tree or near homes because of the litter produced. Instead, the buckeye makes a good selection for woodland areas of full sun to part shade, where it usually grows 20 to 40 feet tall. It needs a medium amount of water and the foliage tends to scorch in dry or windy conditions. It attracts hummingbirds and butterflies.

AMERICAN BASSWOOD, *Tilia americana* var. *heterophylla* is also called the American Linden. Although this tree can be used as a handsome

ornamental street or shade tree, it does not tolerate air pollution or urban conditions and favors the countryside across the Eastern U.S. As a medium to large deciduous tree it ranges in height from 50 to 80 feet, spreads broadly where space permits and grows in zones 3 to 7.



Basswood are found in dry upland areas as well as moist low woods. They can tolerate drought and attract butterflies.

The basswood is noted for its fragrant flowers that bloom in June and attract many bees. Honey from these flowers is a prized gourmet item. Tea can be made from the flowers and syrup can be made from the sweet tree sap. The name refers to the tough inner bark (bastwood) used to make rope and mats. The light fine-grained wood can be commercially harvested to make furniture, shipping crates, boxes and veneer.

RED MAPLE, *acer rubrum*, includes: "Autumn Flame," "Brandywine," "Columnare" and "Kaprick" (most in Indiana are "Franksred" Red Sunset).

This tree lives up to its name in every season. It is one of the earliest trees to come out in the spring, putting out blunt red buds before the leaves appear. Red and orange clusters of flowers hang from reddish twigs, as well as reddish pairs of winged seeds/fruit. Then as the leaves unfold, they too are reddish, gradually turning to green, but the veins and leafstalk keep their reddish tint all summer. Having seen an aerial photo of my neighborhood in the fall, I can testify that my two red maples show a brilliant foliage that is a bright red to maroon.



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It is a popular ornamental and street tree that usually grows from 50 to 80 feet tall. The bark is gray and smooth in young trees, but may become flaky in older trees. The wood is used for boxes, novelties and woodenware. This tree is attractive to bees, butterflies, moths, flies and wasps but it does not tolerate heavy pollution.

All photos: Purdue Arboretum

References:

- <https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderSearch.aspx>
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 - https://grownative.org/native_plants/american-basswood/
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