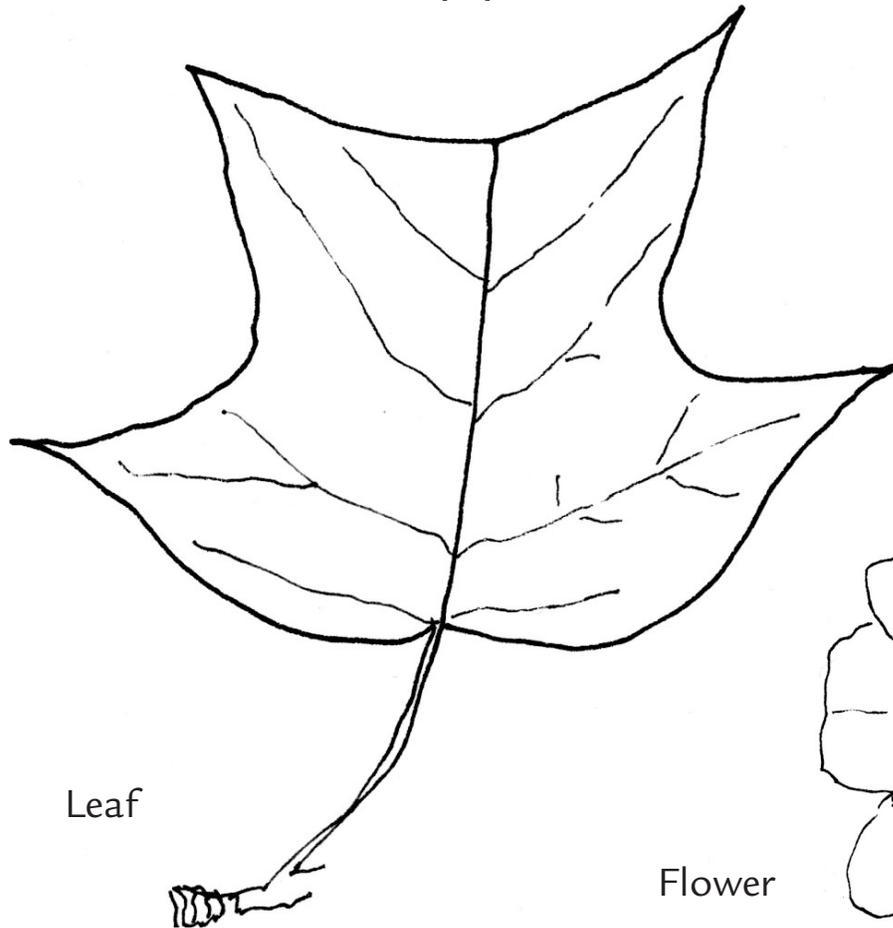


Tulip Tree

Liriodendron tulipifera



Leaf

Flower

The tulip tree is easily recognized in almost any season. In the summer its unique truncated leaf shape separates it from all others. Both the shape of its pale green flowers and outline of its leaves resemble tulips, giving rise to its common name. The leaves stand out even more in the fall when they blaze yellow. Its cone-like fruit lasts through the winter and into spring. From a distance, the tree's upright structure and lack of low branches reveal its identity.

There are many names for this tree. In addition to tulip tree, it is called tulip poplar or yellow poplar due to its similar growth habit with poplar. It also has some unusual folk names based on the shape of the leaves: saddle tree, lyre tree, and old wives' shirt.

Where in the world?

Liriodendron tulipifera, or tulip tree, was known to Native Americans as the canoe tree. Its fine-grained wood resists warping, making it ideal for sturdy dugouts. It is also our tallest native deciduous tree found east of the Mississippi; it can grow in excess of 100 feet.

Liriodendron chinense, or Chinese tulip tree, is a very rare and threatened tree in the wild. It is disappearing because of over-harvesting for its high quality timber. Though its leaves and flowers are similar to our native tulip tree, it grows to a maximum height of only 60 feet. On our native tulip tree, the first horizontal limb may be 60 feet above the ground!



Scientists think that the Chinese tulip tree and our native tulip tree descended from a single species that lived about 12 million years ago. At that time, there was a vast unbroken forest stretching across North America, through Alaska and into Asia. As the continents separated over millions of years, the trees evolved into two distinct species.

Liriodendron tulipifera x chinense is a tree that never existed in the wild. In nature, the two species of tulip tree live 12,000 miles apart. Yet scientists discovered that the species are so closely related that the pollen from one species can fertilize the flowers of the other, resulting in a whole new kind of tulip tree. The scientists in North Carolina who grew this new tree for the first time gave one to the Arboretum as a gift in 1981.

There are over 70 tulip trees
in the Arboretum.

One tree is located on
Meadow Road near the
Hunnewell Visitor Center.

Can you find the rest?

