

Odes to the Sycamore

Watercolor and Ink by Pat Herman



[old]

Sycamores are among the oldest species of trees on Earth, well-known for their longevity, hardiness, and dramatic beauty.

They can live for 250 years, or more. There are several American Sycamores that have been reported to be 500 and 600 years old.

Sycamores are "windfirm" trees. They flourish in temperatures high and low. They need little water, but can survive an abundance of it, too.

[large]

The sycamore is the largest deciduous tree in the eastern U.S. and attains the greatest girth of any tree native to eastern North America.

Sycamores can reach heights of 120 feet. The current single-trunk record holder, in the state of Pennsylvania, is that tall – with a trunk more than 30 feet around.

In colonial times, families used hollow Sycamores as temporary shelter, and a single trunk cavity was known to hold up to 15 men on horseback!

Sycamores grow quickly. They are some of the fastest growing shade trees, adding 1-2 feet to their height each year. They commonly stand 75-100 feet tall when mature.

[everywhere]

There are eight known species of Sycamore trees, all belonging to the "plane tree" family. They grow in much of the U.S. thru USDA zones 4-11 as well as Europe, Asia, Mexico and southern Quebec and Ontario.

In Shanghai, two out of three trees are "London planes." City planners there call it a super tree. Its peculiar, camouflage-patterned bark peels off in quick succession, allowing the tree to "cleanse" itself of pollutants. This gives it a high tolerance to pests and diseases, captures smog and carbon as well.

In our area, they can be seen in numbers at Stone Lake in LaPorte where there are many of them growing on the beach. You probably know of some in your neighborhood or remember one from your childhood.

[bark]

Sycamore bark starts out smooth on young twigs, but as branches grow, the bark begins to peel and crack. It is thin, flaky and exfoliates in patches.

Peeling flakes can vary from white or grey, to tan to brown, red or green. At the bottom of the tree, the bark is dark brown with many furrows and ridges.

In spring the trees have reddish inconspicuous flowers, then small fuzzy brown fruits. Its foliage turns uniformly yellow in Autumn. In winter, Sycamores develop smooth, white bark.

[love]

Sycamores have a rounded, wide-spreading canopy of massive branches and a shallow root system, that can spread as wide as its canopy, up to 70-80 feet.

Their leafy crooked branches give good shade in the hottest summers. Sycamore leaves are large, wide and rough to the touch, four to eight inches long. And some of the last to drop in the Fall.

We love them for their strength, protection, reliability, and spaciousness. Sycamores are magnificent trees!

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