Populus alba: White Poplar

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Introduction

White Poplar is a fast-growing, deciduous tree which reaches 60 to 100 feet in height with a 40 to 50-foot-spread and makes a nice shade tree, although it is considered short-lived. The dark green, lobed leaves have a fuzzy, white underside which gives the tree a sparkling effect when breezes stir the leaves. These leaves are totally covered with this white fuzz when they are young and first open. The fall color is pale yellow. The flowers appear before the leaves in spring but are not showy, and are followed by tiny, fuzzy seedpods which contain numerous seeds. It is the white trunk and bark of white poplar which is particularly striking, along with the beautiful two-toned leaves. The bark stays smooth and white until very old when it can become ridged and furrowed. The wood of White Poplar is fairly brittle and subject to breakage in storms and the soft bark is subject to injury from vandals. Leaves often drop from the tree beginning in summer and continue dropping through the fall.

General Information

Scientific name: Populus alba
Pronunciation: POP-yoo-lus AL-buh
Common name(s): White Poplar
Family: Salicaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 4A through 9B (Fig. 2)

Figure 1. Middle-aged Populus alba: White Poplar
Credits: Ed Gilman

Figure 2. Range
**Populus alba: White Poplar**

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** invasive non-native

**Uses:** reclamation; shade

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

### Description

**Height:** 60 to 100 feet

**Spread:** 40 to 60 feet

**Crown uniformity:** irregular

**Crown shape:** oval

**Crown density:** open

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** coarse

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** lobed, undulate, sinuate/undulate

**Leaf shape:** star-shaped, elliptic (oval)

**Leaf venation:** palmate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches, 4 to 8 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** yellow

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

![Figure 3. Foliage](image)

### Flower

**Flower color:** yellow

**Flower characteristics:** not showy

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** less than .5 inch

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** white/gray

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches don’t droop; showy; typically one trunk; thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure

**Breakage:** susceptible to breakage

**Current year twig color:** gray

**Current year twig thickness:** medium

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

### Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high

### Other

**Roots:** can form large surface roots

**Winter interest:** no

**Outstanding tree:** no

**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown

**Pest resistance:** sensitive to pests/diseases

### Use and Management

White Poplar should be grown in full sun and tolerates almost any soil, wet or dry. Suckering may be a problem on stressed trees but those growing vigorously are usually not bothered. In areas with much air pollution and soot, the fuzzy white undersides of the leaves may attract and hold dirt and dust making them unattractive.

It’s large size and brittle wood limit it to open space plantings such as parks and landfill sites.

The cultivar ’Bolleana’ has a columnar growth habit and irregularly-lobed leaf margins and ’Pendula’ has a weeping form. ’Bolleana’ may be the most commonly planted cultivar.

### Pests

This tree usually has not pests of major concern, but occasionally leafhoppers bother it. There are many potential problems.

### Diseases

Crown gall and trunk cankers can be troublesome.