

Populus nigra 'Italica': Lombardy Poplar¹

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Introduction

Often planted for its fast growth and usefulness as a short-lived screen or windbreak, Lombardy Poplar forms a slender column of many short, upward-pointing branches and can reach 40 to 60 feet in height with a spread of only 10 to 12 feet. But canker disease almost always infects the tree by the time the tree is 10 to 15 years old so trees are rarely seen larger than about 30 feet tall by five feet wide.



Figure 1. Mature *Populus nigra* 'Italica': Lombardy Poplar
Credits: Ed Gilman

The triangular to diamond-shaped, 2 to 3.5-inch-long by 1.5 to 3-inch-wide deciduous leaves are bright green on both sides throughout the year, turning a blazing golden yellow in fall before dropping. The small, inconspicuous flowers appear in spring. The bark is grey/green on young trees and new growth, but becomes black, thickened, and furrowed on older, larger trunks.

General Information

Scientific name: *Populus nigra*

Pronunciation: POP-yoo-lus NYE-gruh

Common name(s): Lombardy Poplar

Family: *Salicaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 3A through 9A (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential



Figure 2. Range

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Uses: reclamation

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

Description

Height: 40 to 50 feet

Spread: 10 to 12 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: columnar

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: crenate, serrate

Leaf shape: deltoid, ovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: yellow

Fall characteristic: showy

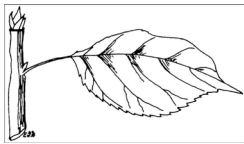


Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: red

Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: no fruit

Fruit length: no fruit

Fruit covering: no fruit

Fruit color: no fruit

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; no fruit; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns

Pruning requirement: little required

Breakage: susceptible to breakage

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: thin

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: sensitive to pests/diseases

Use and Management

If planted, Lombardy Poplar should be grown in full sun on well-drained, acid or alkaline soil. It tolerates wet soil well but also performs in drought, losing leaves early in very dry summers. Multiple suckers often appear at the base of trees and occasionally on roots far from the tree, and the roots are considered invasive. Also, the trees are, unfortunately, very susceptible to stem canker disease which usually limits their life to only 10 or 15-years. Plant other narrow-crowned trees including 'Fastigiata' European Hornbeam, Armstrong Maple, 'Fastigiata' Alder, Fastigiata English Oak, Leyland Cypress, and others instead of this tree.

Propagation is by cuttings since Lombardy Poplar is a male clone.

Pests

No pests are of major concern.

Diseases

Stem canker disease is so devastating that this tree is usually not included on any recommended tree lists, with the exception of a reclamation site. Choose from the many other available columnar or upright screening trees for a more durable planting.