

# *Ginkgo biloba*: Ginkgo<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman, Dennis G. Watson, Ryan W. Klein, Andrew K. Koeser, Deborah R. Hilbert, and Drew C. McLean<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Ginkgo is practically pest-free, resistant to storm damage, and casts light to moderate shade. Young trees are often very open but they fill in to form a denser canopy. It makes a durable street tree where there is enough overhead space to accommodate the large size. The shape is often irregular with a large branch or two seemingly forming its own tree on the trunk. But this does not detract from its usefulness as a city tree unless the tree will be growing in a restricted overhead space. If this is the case, select from the narrow upright cultivars such as 'Princeton Sentry' and 'Fairmont'. Ginkgo tolerates most soil, including compacted, and alkaline, and grows slowly to 75 feet tall or more. The tree is easily transplanted and has a vivid yellow fall color which is second to none in brilliance, even in the south. However, leaves fall quickly and the fall color show is short.

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Ginkgo biloba*

**Pronunciation:** GINK-go bye-LOE-buh

**Common name(s):** Ginkgo, maidenhair tree

**Family:** *Ginkgoaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 3A through 8A (Figure 2)

**Origin:** native to eastern China

**UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status:** not assessed/  
incomplete assessment

**Uses:** sidewalk cutout (tree pit); street without sidewalk; specimen; urban tolerant; Bonsai; highway median; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; tree lawn 4–6 feet wide



Figure 1. Full Form—*Ginkgo biloba*: Ginkgo  
Credits: Gitta Hasing

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department; Andrew K. Koeser, assistant professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center; Deborah R. Hilbert, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; and Drew C. McLean, biological scientist, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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Figure 2. Range

## Description

**Height:** 50 to 75 feet

**Spread:** 50 to 60 feet

**Crown uniformity:** irregular

**Crown shape:** round, pyramidal

**Crown density:** open

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** medium

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** lobed

**Leaf shape:** fan-shaped

**Leaf venation:** parallel, palmate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 3 inches

**Leaf color:** bright green

**Fall color:** yellow

**Fall characteristic:** showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** green

**Flower characteristics:** not showy; male—emerges in clusters on 1" long catkins; female—1 ½"–2" long pedicel with 1–2 greenish ovules

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** oval, round

**Fruit length:** ¾ to 1 ½ inches

**Fruit covering:** fleshy, naked seed

**Fruit color:** tan to orange

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem; emits a pungent odor some find to be offensive

**Fruiting:** fall, and matures after a frost



Figure 3. Leaf—*Ginkgo biloba*: Ginkgo

Credits: Gitta Hasing



Figure 4. Flower—*Ginkgo biloba*: Ginkgo

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Figure 5. Fruit—*Ginkgo biloba*: Ginkgo

Credits: Gary Kling



## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/branches:** branches droop; showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

**Bark:** gray brown with textured ridges, becoming deeply furrowed with age

**Pruning requirement:** little required

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown, gray

**Current year twig thickness:** medium, thick

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown



Figure 6. Bark—*Ginkgo biloba*: Ginkgo

Credits: Gitta Hasing

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun to partial shade

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

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem

**Winter interest:** yes

**Outstanding tree:** no

**Ozone sensitivity:** tolerant

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** resistant

**Pest resistance:** free of serious pests and diseases

## Use and Management

Female plants are wider-spreading than the males. Only male plants should be used as the female produces foul smelling fruit in late autumn. The only way to select a male plant is to purchase a named cultivar including 'Autumn Gold', 'Fastigiata', 'Princeton Sentry', and 'Lakeview' because there is no reliable way to select a male plant from a seedling until it fruits. It could take as long as 20 years or more for ginkgo to fruit.

Ginkgo may grow extremely slow for several years after planting, but will then pick up and grow at a moderate rate, particularly if it receives an adequate supply of water and some fertilizer. But do not overwater or plant in a poorly-drained area. Be sure to keep turf several feet away from the trunk to help trees become established. Very tolerant of urban soils and pollution, ginkgo could be used more in USDA hardiness zone 7 but is not recommended in central and southern Texas or Oklahoma due to summer heat. Adapted for use as a street tree, even in confined soil spaces. Some early pruning to form one central leader is essential.

There are several cultivars: 'Autumn Gold'—male, fruitless, bright gold fall color and rapid growth rate; 'Fairmont'—male, fruitless, upright, oval to pyramidal form; 'Fastigiata'—male, fruitless, upright growth; 'Laciniata'—leaf margins deeply divided; 'Lakeview'—male, fruitless, compact broad conical form; 'Mayfield'—male, upright fastigiate (columnar) growth; 'Pendula'—pendent branches; 'Princeton Sentry'—male, fruitless, fastigiate, narrow conical crown for restricted overhead spaces, popular, 65 feet tall, available in some nurseries; 'Santa Cruz'—umbrella-shaped, 'Variegata'—variegated leaves.

Propagation is by seed or grafting males.

## Pests and Diseases

This tree is pest-free and considered resistant to gypsy moth.

## Reference

Koeser, A. K., Hasing, G., Friedman, M. H., and Irving, R. B. 2015. Trees: North & Central Florida. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.