



Nursery News

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Gymnocladus dioicus

Kentucky Coffeetree

Kentucky Coffeetree grow as individuals or in small clonal groups that sprout from the roots. Preferring moist soils, in nature they are found mostly in river valleys and floodplains. However, they are very adaptable to dry soils and urban conditions. This hardy tree is tolerant of heat, cold, deicing salt, reflected light and air pollution, making it an excellent street tree.

Virtually pest free, it is a valuable alternative to elm and ash where they have been destroyed by insects and disease. Kentucky Coffeetree was planted on mine spoils for soil reclamation and stabilization.

Gymnocladus means 'Naked Branch' in Greek. Young trees are gangly 'ugly ducklings' that grow into a beautiful shade tree. Unique bark and angular branching creates interesting winter profile. No two trees are the same.

The leaves are said to have been used as a fly poison and to treat some skin diseases. The seeds have been used as shirt buttons, slingshot ammo, and roasted as a coffee substitute (hence the name). The fruit is also high in saponins and is used as soap.

Native Americans used the pulp from the wood to treat insanity, combat fever and treat headaches. They used the roots as a black dye and laxative, roasted and ate the seeds, used the bark as an appetizer. Hunting tribes put large quantities of the beans in streams and lakes to stupefy or kill the fish.



Flowers: Yellow-green fragrant flowers form long clusters in late spring up to 12" long.

Bark: Unique dark brown bark has rough scaly ridges with outward curling.



Leaves: Leaf is made up of over 100 separate feathered leaflets arranged on branches of the rib. They emerge late in spring a fuzzy reddish color, becoming blue-green in summer and finally turning yellow in the fall.



Fruit: 8" seedpods on female trees hold hard smooth dark brown seeds. Seeds are poisonous when raw - roasting is said to neutralize the poison.