

SUGARBERRY

Celtis laevigata Willd.
Plant Symbol = CELA

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program



Robert H. Mohlenbrock. USDA SCS, 1989. *Midwest wetland flora: Field office illustrated guide to plant species*. Midwest National Technical Center, Lincoln. Courtesy of [USDA NRCS Wetland Science Institute](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wetland-science).

Alternate Names

Texas sugarberry, sugar hackberry, hackberry, palo blanco, southern hackberry, and lowland hackberry

Uses

Conservation: Sugarberry is used in native landscaping and habitat restorations, and windbreaks.

Ethnobotanic: Sugarberry was used by a variety of Native American tribes. The Houma used a concentrate made from the bark to treat sore throats and a decoction made from the bark and ground up shells to treat venereal disease. The Comanche would beat the fruits of sugarberry to a pulp. The pulp was then mixed with animal fat, rolled into balls, and roasted in the fire for food. The Acoma, Navajo, and Tewa all consumed the berries for food. The Navajo boiled the leaves and branches to make dark brown and red dye for wool.

Wildlife: Many species of songbirds including mockingbirds and robins eat the fruit and use the tree for nesting habitat. It is a larval and nectar host for two butterflies: hackberry emperor (*Asterocampa celtis*) and American snout (*Libytheana carineta*). White-tailed deer browse the leaves and fruit.

Other Uses: Sugarberry is used for furniture, athletic goods, firewood, and plywood. It has limited use for flooring, creating, and for wood posts. It is used as an ornamental and as a street tree in residential areas in the lower South

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description and Adaptation

Sugarberry is a native tree that can grow up to 80 feet in height and up to 3 feet in diameter. It is a short lived tree, probably living not more than 150 years. It has a broad crown formed by spreading branches that are often drooped. The bark is light gray in color and can be smooth or covered with corky warts. The branchlets are covered with short hairs at first and eventually they become smooth. The leaves are alternated, simple, and slightly serrate. The leaves are 2-4 inches long and 1 to 2 inches wide. The lance-shaped leaves gradually taper to a point that is often curved. They are pale green on both the upper and lower surfaces with conspicuous veins. The flowers appear just before or with the leaves in the spring. The drupes or fruit have a thick skin and the surface has a netlike pattern. They will range in color from orange to reddish-brown.

Sugarberry is found growing in sandy loam or rocky soils along streams, in bottomlands, and in woodlands.

Distribution: Sugarberry ranges south from southeastern Virginia to southern Florida, west to central Texas and northeastern Mexico, and north to western Oklahoma, southern Kansas, Missouri, southern Illinois, southern Indiana, and western Kentucky. It is localized in Maryland, the Rio Grande Valley, and northeastern Mexico. Its range overlaps the southern part of the range of common hackberry (*C. occidentalis*). Please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Establishment

Sugarberry can be propagated by seed and cuttings. The mature fruits can be picked from late summer until winter. Air-dry the fruits with pulp on or soak overnight and rub pulp off on a screen. To stratify, store wet seeds in sealed containers in a refrigerator for 60-90 days at 41 degrees. Stratified seed can be sown in the spring or you may sow non-stratified seed in the fall. Sugarberry can be rooted from juvenile wood and from root sprouts or suckers.

Management

Sugarberry that is top-killed by fire or cut at the base of the trunk will re-sprout from the root collar.

Pests and Potential Problems

When grown in its native habitat and from local seed stock, sugarberry is not prone to debilitating pests. It is frequently parasitized by mistletoe. It appears to be no more sensitive to trunk rot than laurel oak (*Q. laurifolia*).

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

'All Seasons' is a fine-textured, small leaf, yellow fall color cultivar which was developed for horticultural use. It is probably the only cultivar. Sugarberry is available from most nurseries within the species range. Contact your local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information.

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Citation

Houck, M, Anderson, M. 2009 Plant fact sheet for sugarberry (*Celtis laevigata* Willd). USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Louisiana State Office, Alexandria, LA 70102

Published October, 2009

Edited: 17Sep09 jfl; 17Sep09 mws;

For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>>, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>