

## Carya illinoensis – Pecan

*Carya illinoensis*, commonly known as the pecan tree is a species of hickory that is native to the southern United States and Mexico. Mature trees can reach 50m in height and are valued as shade trees and for their pecan nuts, which are a major commercial crop in states like Georgia and Texas.

Pecan trees grow naturally in the rich bottomland soils of the floodplains and valleys of the Mississippi River and its tributaries, from Iowa and Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico. They also occur along larger streams and rivers in Oklahoma, Texas and northern Mexico. Pecans are cultivated throughout much of the southern U.S. Most commercial production is in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and increasingly in New Mexico, where they are grown with irrigation. Pecan has been widely planted outside its natural range and are grown commercially in Spain, France, Israel, South Africa and Australia.

The Pecan tree has grey bark that becomes reddish brown with age, developing narrow furrows and rough, angled ridges. Leaves are alternate, compound, 30 to 50cm long with 9-17 leaflets that are 7 to 18cm long and 3 to 5cm in width. On top they are smooth to slightly hairy and dark yellow green, slightly paler beneath. Flowers are seen in the spring with both sexes on the same tree. Fruit ripens in the autumn in clusters of 3 to 11. The husk is thin and splits into four sections and often stays on the tree after the nut has fallen. The nut is light reddish brown with irregular black or darker brown blotches. The meat is edible, sweet and oily.

Pecan trees have hard, reddish-brown wood that is used to make tool handles, flooring, veneer and furniture.

The Pecan is a slow growing tree that takes 15 to 20 years before it starts bearing and requires a frost free period of 6 to 9 months for its nuts to mature. It is best grown in full sun in a deep rich soil with good moisture.

### Propagation

Seeds are best sown in a cold frame as soon as they are ripe.

Pecan seeds show delayed germination and require a period of cold stratification. Seeds should be stratified at 5°C for thirty to sixty days and then followed by incubation at room temperature.

Sow seed to a depth of 3cm in a good quality potting mix. Maintain the media in a moist but not damp state and place the propagation tray in a warm dark place.

The seedlings should be transplanted when they are large enough to handle and planted in deep pots to accommodate the taproot. Put the plants in their

permanent positions as soon as possible, preferable during the first summer, and give them some protection from the cold for the first winter.

Pecan requires a frost-free period of 6 to 9 months for nuts to be produced and mature.



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