

Liriodendron tulipifera – Tulip Tree

Liriodendron tulipifera, commonly known as the Tulip Poplar, Yellow Poplar or Tulip Tree, is a large, fast-growing deciduous tree native to the east of the United States where it is found from New England in the north to the Gulf states in the south.

The Tulip Tree grows up to 30m in height with trunk diameter to 1.5m in a columnar shape with a tall, straight trunk and with the upper branches creating a rounded crown. In an open landscape it has a more upright, oval shape. The leaves are alternate and simple, broad and up to 15cm with short lobes and a distinctive tuliplike shape. With their width and short petiole leaves flutter at the slightest wind. Bark is distinctive in its light gray shades of youth blending into the light brown tones of maturity, with interlacing ridges that are contrasted with deep furrows on the straight trunks

From the Magnoliaceae family and flowering in the Spring and Summer (flowering time is later in cooler climates) blooms are large (4cm wide by 5 cm deep), cup-shaped, solitary, fragrant and showy with six yellow-green petals surrounded by three green sepals and resembling a huge tulip. The interior of the flower contains a bright orange and yellow corolla, surrounding the central spire of immature aggregate fruits. Remember though that these trees can take up to 20 years to mature and flower, but then they can live for up to 200 years. Flowers are followed by fruit that is a cone-like structure consisting of many winged samaras on a central stalk. In the autumn foliage turns to a yellowish gold that makes an attractive display.

In its native environment the Tulip Tree attracts hummingbirds, birds, and squirrels and is a host plant for tiger and spicebush swallowtail butterflies. It yields soft white woods used especially for cabinet work and is an important timber tree for the veneer and paper pulp industries.

Tulip tree will take full sun to partial sun although it prefers full sun in a deep, rich, moist soil that at times can be wet, but a mature tree with a fully established root system adapts to drier soils. It has a very wide native range and is very frost tolerant in Australian conditions.

Used as a shade, specimen, ornamental, or focal point tree, it may be too large for the average home garden.

Propagation

Pre-treatment

Seed requires 12 weeks cold stratification to give the impression of having gone through a cold Winter. To stratify place the seed in lightly damp perlite in a plastic bag and place it in the crisper section of your refrigerator. Some seed may germinate in the media.

After stratification, sow the seed in a good quality potting mix. Cover seed lightly and maintain the medium in a moist but not damp state. Place your seed tray in cool shady position.

When seedlings are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and grow them on in the greenhouse for at least their first winter. Plant them out into their permanent positions in late spring or early summer, after the last expected frosts.

