

POPULUS BALSAMIFERA L.  
Balsam Poplar

FAMILY: Salicaceae

HABIT: Tree up to 30 m. with dark, gray-furrowed bark; flowering late April-May; fruiting May, June.

SIMILAR SPECIES: *Populus balsamifera*, with its fragrant foliage, might be confused with *Populus X gileadensis*, Balm-of-Gilead. The ovate leaves of *P. balsamifera* have a pale, metallic luster on the underside while the cordate-ovate leaves of *P. X gileadensis* are pubescent beneath.

TOTAL RANGE: Labrador to AK, s. to CT, n. PA, n. IN, n. IA, NE and CO.

STATE RANGE (as of 2008): There are post-1980 records from Ashtabula and Geauga counties. There are pre-1980 records from Lucas and Ottawa counties.

HABITAT: Various types of moist communities including wet woods, riverbanks, sandbars, bog and swamp margins, and shores.

HAZARDS: Alteration of water supply; air pollution (Le Blanc et al., 1972); dense shading due to succession (Barnes and Wagner, 1981).

RECOVERY POTENTIAL: Presumed good due to its generalized habitat.

INVENTORY GUIDELINES: Fully expanded leaves are needed for identification. Flowering or fruiting material would be preferred for positive identification, but this material is often difficult to obtain. Because this tree is occasionally cultivated, efforts should be made to assess the natural qualities of the area where collected.

COMMENTS: *Populus balsamifera* is known to hybridize with the more common native *P. deltoides* (Ronald and Steele, 1974). This hybrid might also occur in Ohio.

While many poplars are susceptible to air pollution (Le Blanc et al., 1972), Balsam poplar is somewhat more resistant than many of the others.

There was apparently some taxonomic confusion in the first half of this century concerning the use of the specific epithet of this tree. This situation is discussed in Little (1979). Some authors divide the species into a number of different varieties. Under this concept, Ohio plants are the var. *subcordata* Hylander.

SELECTED REFERENCES:

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- Little, E.L., Jr. 1979. Checklist of United States trees (native and naturalized). USDA Forest Service, Agricultural Handbook No. 541. 375 p.
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