

Learning about Red Mulberry

Morus rubra



Characteristics. Red mulberry is a small native tree with a spreading, rounded crown. Mature height ranges from 15 to 70 feet. The bark is dark and scaly. The tree is shallow rooted. Red mulberry usually lives 125 years or less. Red mulberry is somewhat tolerant of flooding. It will withstand inundation for a complete growing season, but will be killed by inundation over two growing seasons. The leaves of the red mulberry are alternate and simple, and oval-shaped. They are up to six inches long and broad. They have toothed edges and vary in appearance from heart-shaped (unlobed) to deeply lobed (usually two or three lobes). The leaves have a rough texture on the upper side and are hairy on the underside. The upper leaf surface is usually darker green than the underside. The leaves turn pale yellow in the fall.



Fruit. Red mulberries generally produce seeds between the ages of 30 and 85 years. Red mulberry catkins appear in April and May, mature fruits from June to August. Mature fruits fall near the tree, but most are consumed before becoming fully mature. The seeds are dispersed by birds after passing through their digestive tracts. Seeds can be sown in the fall without stratification, or in spring after a 30-90 days at 33-41 degrees Fahrenheit in moist sand.



Geographic Range. Red mulberry is native to the eastern portion of the United States, from Vermont over to Nebraska and down to Texas and the Gulf Coast. It usually occurs as scattered individual trees in floodplain forests, where it is an understory tree. It grows well under a variety of conditions. In the south, the best growth occurs in moist, well-drained soils of floodplains.

Additional Information.

- Birds that like red mulberry include wood ducks, bluebirds, indigo buntings, gray catbirds, eastern kingbirds, towhees, orchard orioles, brown thrashers, summer tanagers, vireos, red-cockaded woodpeckers, red-bellied woodpeckers, great crested flycatchers, and Lewis' woodpeckers. Other consumers include opossums, raccoons, fox squirrels and gray squirrels. The twigs and foliage are browsed by white-tailed deer. Beavers consume the bark.
- The fruit of the red mulberry is used to make jams, jellies, pies and beverages.
- Native Americans used the fibrous bark to make cloth. In addition, they used the plant medicinally to treat dysentery, and as a laxative or purgative.

References:

- Burns, Russell M., and Barbara H. Honkala, tech. coords. 1990. *Silvics of North America*: 1. Conifers; 2. Hardwoods. Agriculture Handbook 654. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Washington, DC. vol.2, 877 p., http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/silvics_manual/Volume_2/morus/rubra.htm, [June 4, 2002]
- Mills, Bill, Photos - Trees of the North American Central Hardwood Region, Dave's Computer World Incorporated, <http://www.dcw.com/~bmills/trees/trees.htm> [June 4, 2002]
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2001. The PLANTS Database, Version 3.1 (<http://plants.usda.gov>). National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fire Sciences Laboratory (2002, April). Fire Effects Information System, [Online]. Available: <http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/> [June 4, 2002].

