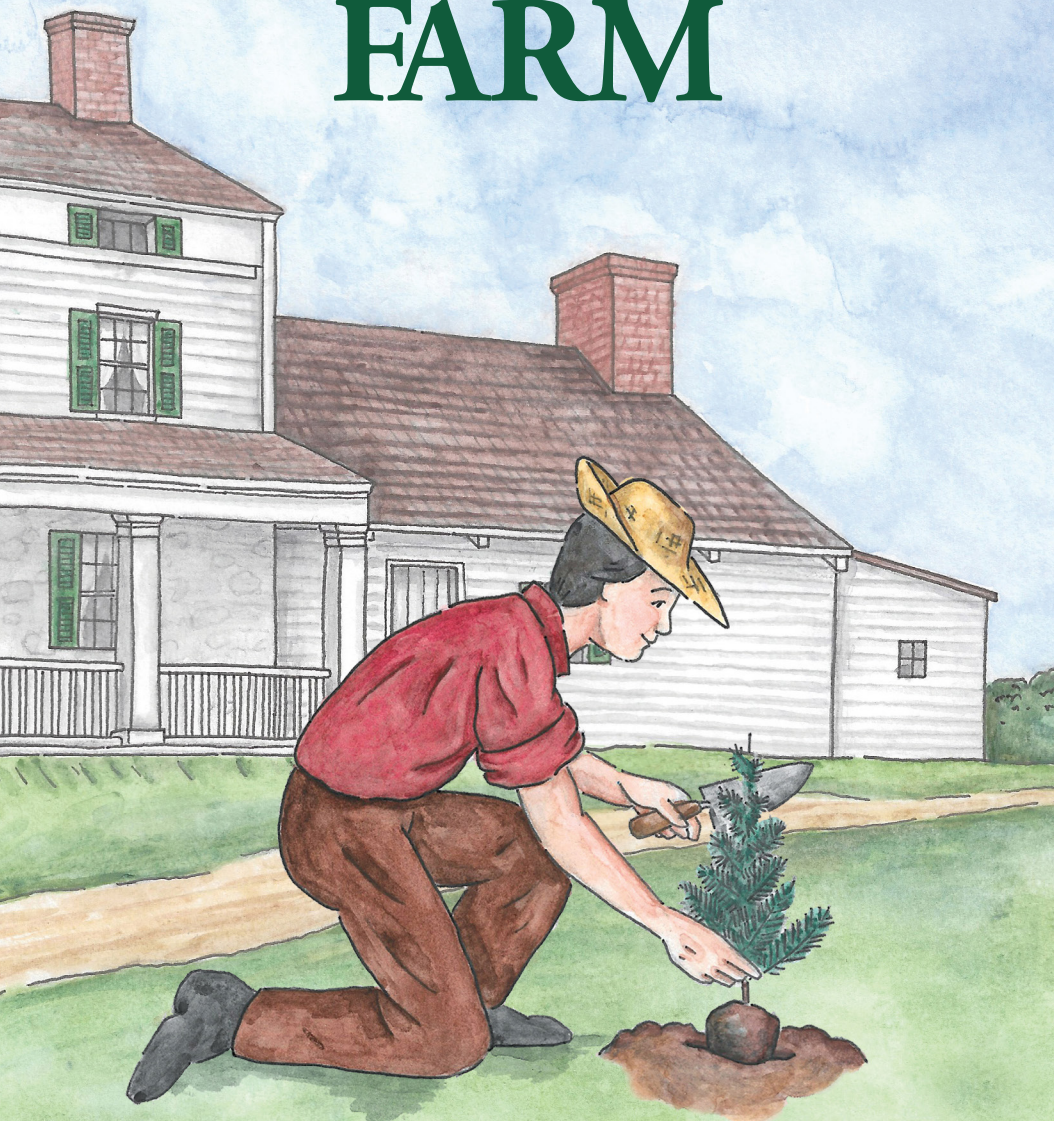


THE GREAT TREES OF TOSOMOCK FARM



Friends of Olmsted-Beil House
Written & Illustrated by Giuseppe Settineri



Please support Friends of Olmsted-Beil House, whose mission is to protect, preserve, and present the Olmsted-Beil House. The house is in the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation's Olmsted-Beil House Park, 4515 Hylan Blvd., Staten Island, NY 10312

To make a donation or to become a member, please visit our website, **olmstedbeilhouse.org** or scan the QR code below:



✉ info@olmstedbeilhouse.org

📷 [olmstedbeilhouse](https://www.instagram.com/olmstedbeilhouse)

f [Friends of Olmsted-Beil House](https://www.facebook.com/Friends of Olmsted-Beil House)

Written and Illustrated (Cover Art & Interior Drawings)
by Giuseppe Settineri

©Friends of Olmsted-Beil House 2022

Thank you to Ray Matarazzo and Tina Kaasmann-Dunn for their help and expertise in the completion of this project. Also, thank you to Maureen Stoddard Marlow for her help in editing this booklet.

Thank you to Phillips 66 for their generous support in the printing of this booklet.



Cover art: Frederick Law Olmsted planting a Cedar of Lebanon tree in front of his farmhouse.

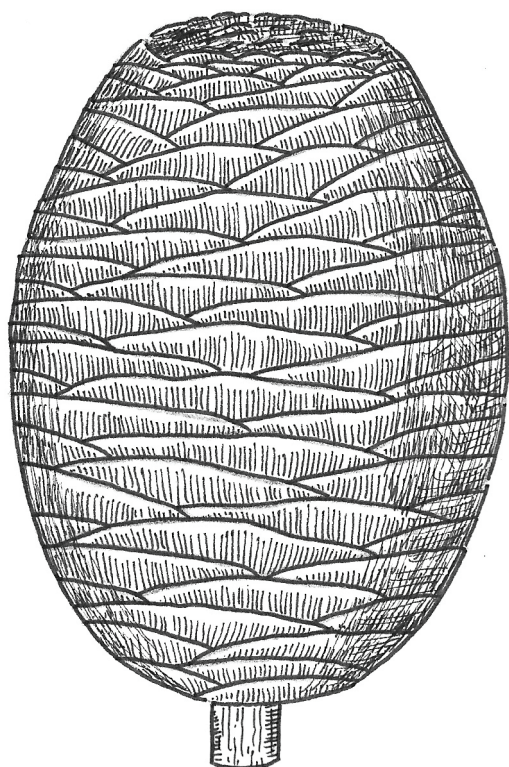
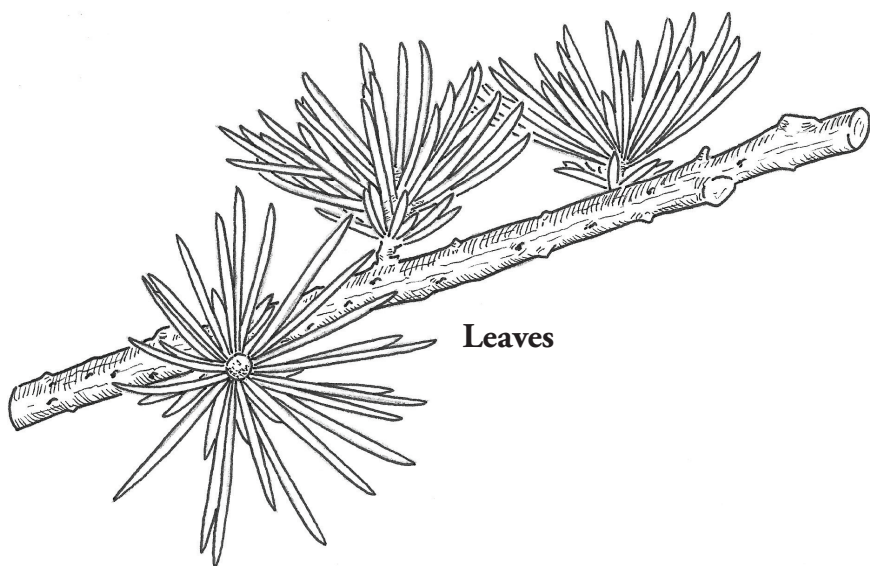
Back cover art: The same Cedar of Lebanon tree a few years later, with part of Olmsted's farmhouse in the background.

Introduction

Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) is known as the founder of American landscape architecture and was the leading landscape architect of his day. He designed numerous landscapes across North America including some well-known parks. A few of them include Manhattan's Central Park and Brooklyn's Prospect Park.

In 1848, Frederick's father, John Olmsted Sr., purchased a 130-acre farm for him on Staten Island, where Frederick made his home in March of that year. Frederick was only 25 years old when he moved to the farm, and he lived here for seven years, until 1855. He called it "Tosomock Farm." This farm played an important role in Frederick's development as a landscape architect. It was here that he took his first steps toward a career in landscape architecture by making many improvements to his property. These included adding a curving driveway and planting thousands of trees, some of which still stand. He would go on to include some of these types of trees in his future designs of Central Park and many other spaces.

This booklet provides some background and information on the trees that Frederick planted on his Staten Island farm that still stand today. We hope that it will encourage you to learn more about Frederick Law Olmsted's time at Tosomock Farm and about his 17th-century Staten Island farmhouse, which still stands, now known as the "Olmsted-Beil House".



Cone

Cedar of Lebanon

(Cedrus libani)

The Cedar of Lebanon is an evergreen tree in the pine family. It is native to the mountains of the eastern Mediterranean, specifically western Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey. The cedar trees can survive for up to 5,000 years. They can grow up to 100 ft, and their trunks can reach a diameter of 8 ft, 2 in.

Characteristics

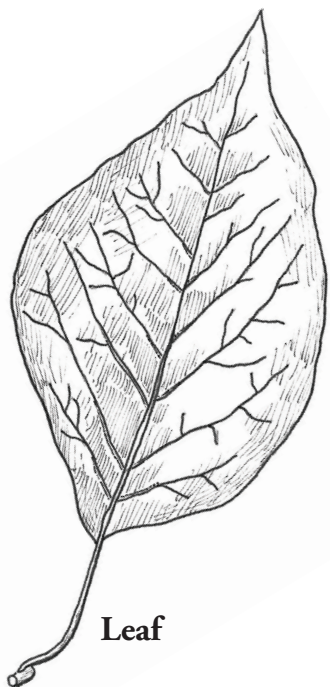
- Needle-like, blue-green leaves
- Barrel-like cones that measure 5 in long
- Wide-spreading horizontal branches that can spread out to 50 ft or more

History & Uses

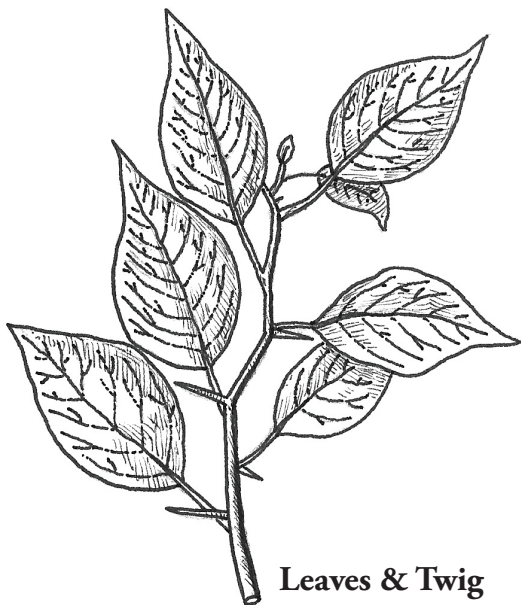
The cedar is the national symbol of Lebanon. These trees symbolize resilience, beauty, and strength and have played an important role in Middle Eastern culture and history. Ancient people prized cedar wood for its durability and used it to construct temples, tombs, and other major structures. In fact, cedar wood was used in the construction of King Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. In addition, the Phoenicians, who were known as excellent shipbuilders and traders, used cedar wood to build their ships.

Landscaping & Olmsted

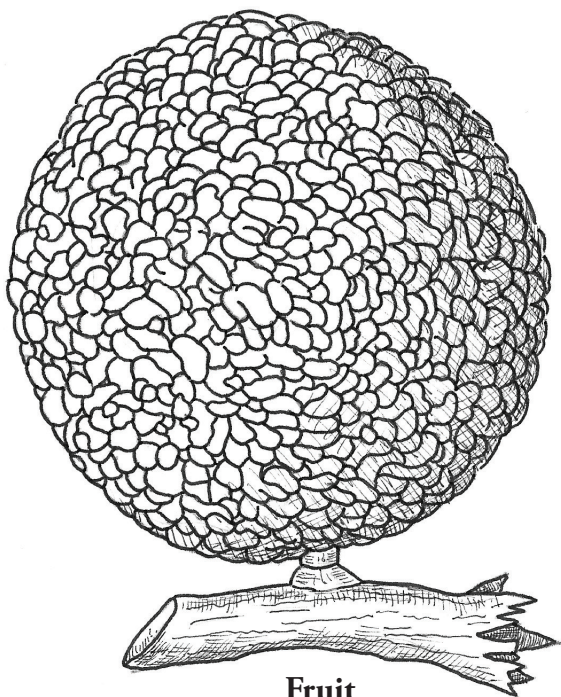
There are two Cedar of Lebanon trees in Olmsted-Beil House Park today. They both stand on the east side of the house. It is believed that these trees arrived at Tosomock Farm from Europe in late 1850 as part of a shipment that included a variety of shrubs and trees. On December 21, 1850, Olmsted wrote to his friend Frederick Kingsbury, "My trees are to arrive soon. ... I have a lot of (pot plants) Cedar of Lebanon." Olmsted included the two cedars in a sketch that he made of his Staten Island farm grounds dated circa 1850.



Leaf



Leaves & Twig



Fruit

Osage Orange

(*Maclura pomifera*)

Osage Orange is a member of the mulberry family. It is also called Hedge Apple, Mock Orange, and Monkey Brains. It is native to eastern Texas, southeastern Oklahoma, and southwestern Arkansas. These areas were home to the Osage people, which is how the tree got its name. It can grow to 50 ft in height.

Characteristics

- Yellow-orange wood
- Deep green, oval-shaped leaves
- Yellow-green round fruit that measures 3 to 5 in in diameter.
- Stout thorns

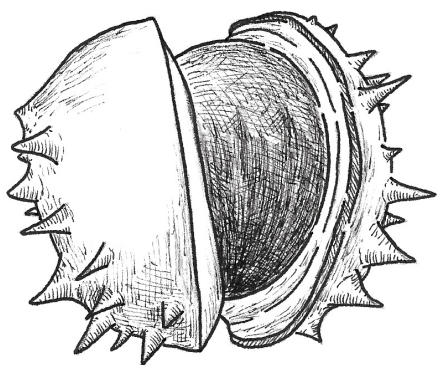
History & Uses

The wood of the Osage Orange is very durable, strong, and elastic, which is why the Osage people used it to make bows. In fact, French settlers in the area called the wood “bois d’arc,” meaning “bow wood.” In 1804, American explorer Marriweather Lewis noted that the native Americans prized the wood so much that they traveled “... many hundred miles in quest of it.”

American settlers used Osage Orange trees as hedges due to their stout growth and thorns. In the 1840’s, Andrew Jackson Downing, who was a well-known horticulturalist and Olmsted’s mentor, wrote of the tree, “... we have no longer a doubt that it is destined to become the favorite hedge plant of all that part of the Union lying south and west of the State of New York.” Thousands of these trees were used as hedges until the invention of barbed wire in the 1870’s.

Landscaping & Olmsted

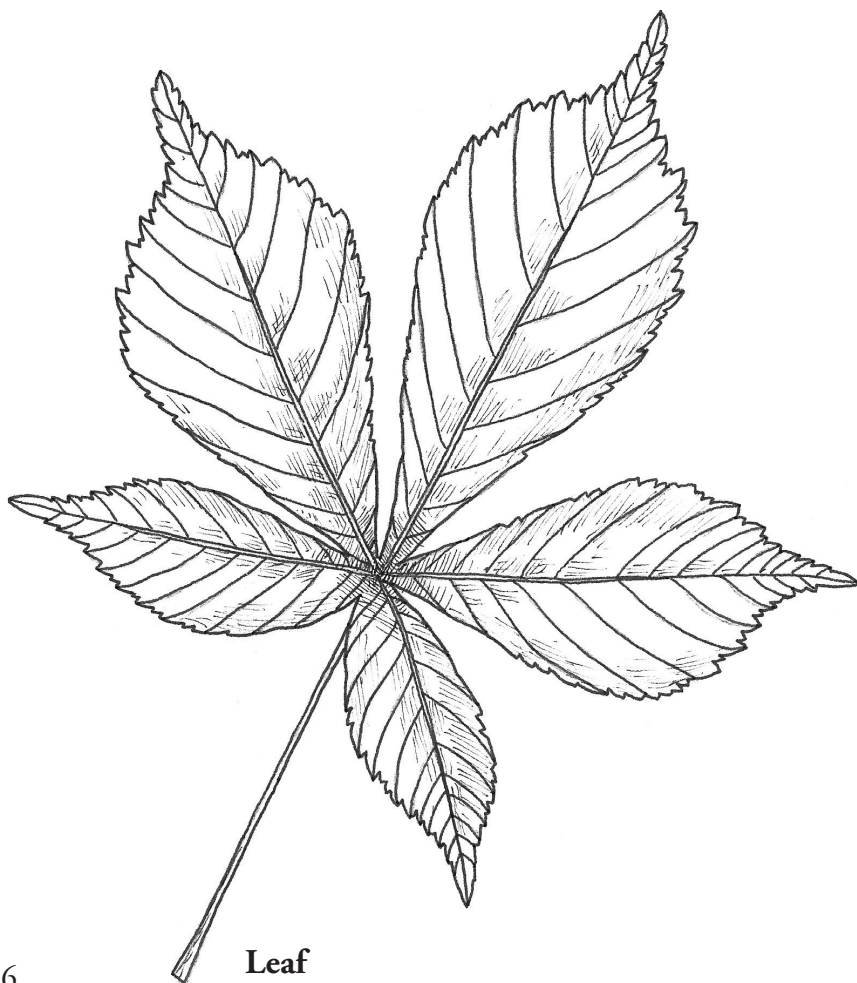
Osage Orange trees were also used as hedges on Tosomock Farm. In fact, in 1855, an Osage Orange hedge was planted around the orchards on the farm. It is believed that the ancient Osage Orange tree on the east side of the Olmsted-Beil House is a remnant from one of the original hedges.



Shell & Fruit



Fruit



Leaf

Horse Chestnut

(*Aesculus hippocastanum*)

The Horse Chestnut is a large tree found in Europe, Asia, and North America. Horse Chestnuts are native to the Balkan region. The tree's name is said to have originated in Turkey, where its fruit was ground up and fed to horses to cure a lung disorder known as "Broken Wind." The trees can grow up to 80 ft in height.

Characteristics

- 5 to 7 pointed, toothed leaves
- Pink to white flowers that bloom in May
- Red-brown fruit inside a spiky green shell. They fall to the ground in autumn. These fruits are eaten by various animals but can be poisonous to humans if eaten in large quantities.

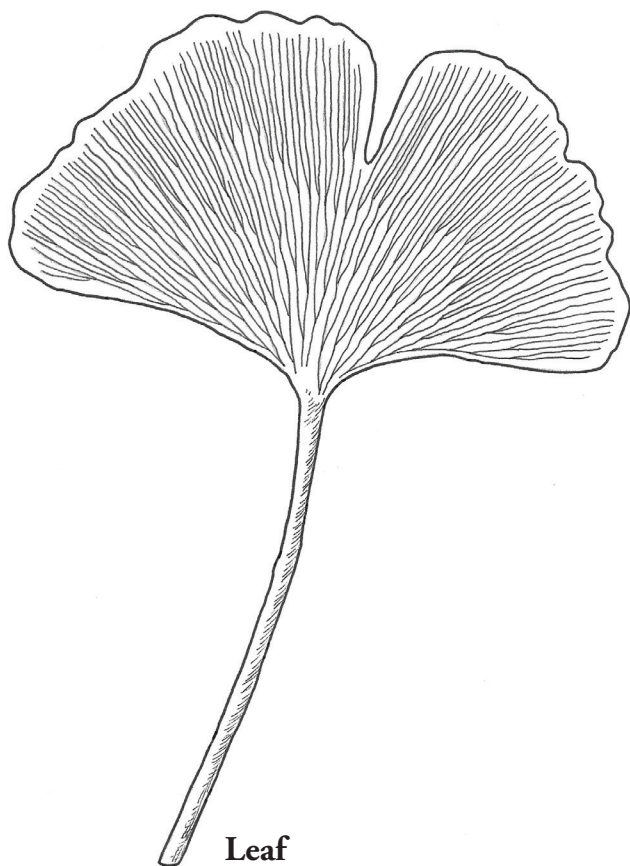
History & Uses

The Horse Chestnut was first introduced to England in the late 1500's from Turkey. For generations, the fruit of the Horse Chestnut has been used in a popular game in England called "Conkers." This game involves a contest in which the seeds are swung at each other until one of them breaks. In addition, during both world wars, the British government collected Horse Chestnuts because they contain a chemical that was used to produce military armaments.

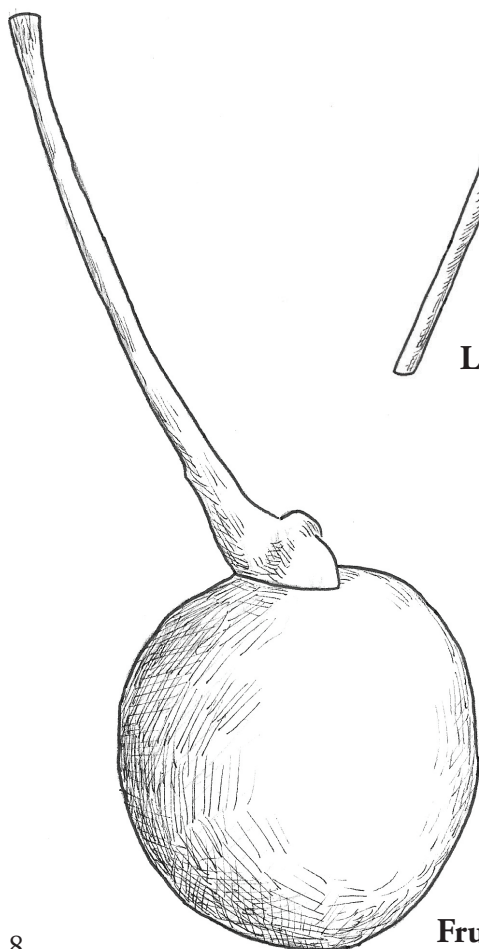
In Germany, Horse Chestnuts were once planted by brewers above their beer cellars. The tree's thick foliage provided shade that helped to keep the cellars cool on hot days. German immigrants and brewers later planted the trees in America.

Landscaping & Olmsted

Horse Chestnuts are commonly used as ornamental trees in cities, parks, and residential areas. In the 19th century, Olmsted's mentor, Andrew Jackson Downing, praised the tree for the beauty of its flowers in the spring. He said that when in bloom, the tree had the appearance of a "flowering shrub" and that "At that season, there can be no more beautiful object to stand singly upon the lawn ...". Olmsted used Horse Chestnuts in many of his designs including Central Park.



Leaf



Fruit

Ginkgo

(*Ginkgo biloba*)

The Ginkgo tree is native to China. It is very durable and can tolerate many conditions such as pollution, heat, and salt. The Ginkgo can grow to a height of 100 ft and can live up to 3,000 years.

Characteristics

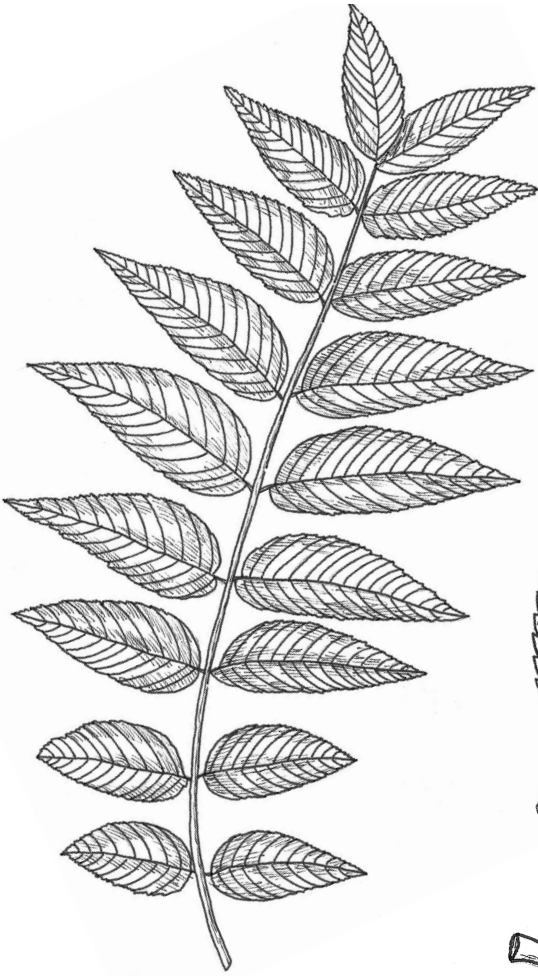
- Fan-shaped leaves that turn yellow in the fall
- Light-colored wood
- Pyramidal shape

History & Uses

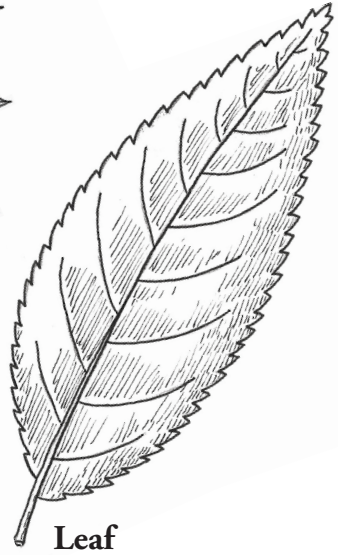
The Ginkgo tree was around when the dinosaurs roamed the Earth, which is why it is known as a “living fossil.” In fact, the oldest Ginkgo leaf fossils date back 270 million years. The Ginkgo was first introduced to the United States from England in 1784. The seeds and leaves of the tree are used as a medicine throughout the world.

Landscaping & Olmsted

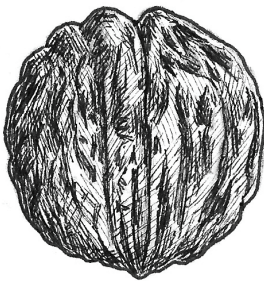
The Ginkgo is used as both an ornamental and shade tree due to its distinctive leaves and canopy-like branches that offer protection from the sun. It is also a common street tree. Andrew Jackson Downing wrote of the tree, “The Ginkgo tree is so great a botanical curiosity, and is so singularly beautiful when clad with its fern-like foliage, that it is strikingly adapted to add ornament and interest to the pleasure-ground.” Downing also suggested that the Ginkgo be planted near buildings, “...where its unique character can be readily seen and appreciated.” Olmsted used Ginkgo trees in many of his designs, including Central Park and the U.S. Capitol Grounds.



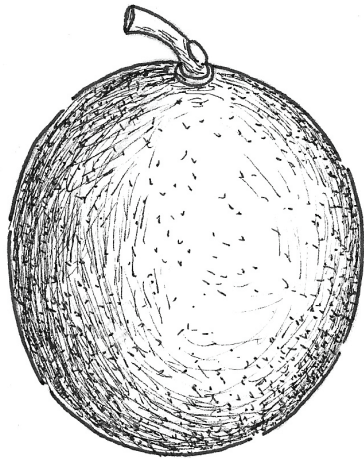
Leaves on Stem



Leaf



Nut



Husk

Black Walnut

(Juglans nigra)

The Black Walnut is a large tree native to North America. It can grow to a height of 100 ft and its branches can spread out to 75 ft.

Characteristics

- Pinnate leaves
- Produces a nut, which is made up of three layers. They include a green, fleshy husk; a hard, black inner shell; and a kernel. They fall to the ground when they are ripe in September and October and are eaten by woodpeckers, foxes, and squirrels.
- Round shape

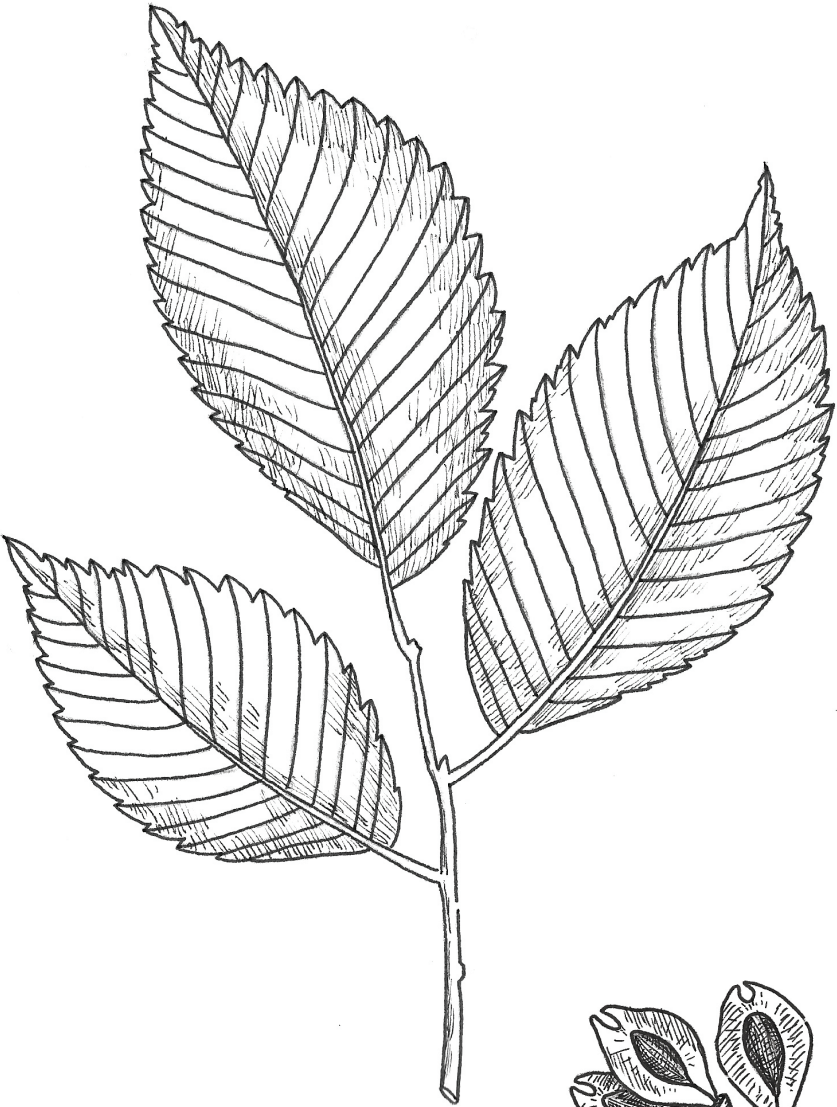
History & Uses

The Black Walnut tree played an important part in the lives of native Americans. They used the bark, leaves, and husk of the Black Walnut for medicine and dyes. The nuts were also an important food source.

Black Walnut wood has always been prized in cabinetmaking for its rich, dark brown color and handsome grain. In addition, during World War II, the shells of Black Walnuts were used to clean airplane pistons.

Landscaping & Olmsted

Andrew Jackson Downing wrote, “The Black Walnut has strong claims upon the Landscape Gardener, as it is one of the grandest and most massive trees which he can employ.” Downing admired its thick foliage and curving branches and recommended it for use in parks and on lawns and public streets. Olmsted included Black Walnut trees in his design for Central Park.



Leaves



Seeds

American Elm

(*Ulmus americana*)

The American Elm is a large, graceful tree that can reach up to 120 ft in height and can have a trunk diameter of more than 6 ft. It attracts birds and butterflies and is fast growing.

Characteristics

- Oval, toothed leaves with pointed tip
- V-shaped trunk
- Wide canopy

History & Uses

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the American Elm was commonly found on lawns and city streets. Sadly, many elms were lost due to Dutch Elm disease, which was introduced to the United States around 1930.

Landscaping & Olmsted

The American Elm is said to have been one of Frederick Law Olmsted's favorite trees. Interestingly, the name Olmsted is a variation of "Elmsted," meaning "Place of Elms." In his book *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*, Olmsted wrote, "the English elm is a much finer tree than I had been aware of – very tall, yet with drooping limbs and fine thick foliage; not nearly as fine as a single tree as our elm..."

Olmsted used American Elms in many of his designs. Elms stand along Central Park's Mall, which runs through the middle of the park, from 66th to 72nd Streets. According to the Central Park Conservancy, this is "... one of the largest and last stands of American Elm trees in North America." In addition, for almost 200 years, an American Elm stood on Olmsted's property in Brookline, MA, called "Fairsted," which served as his home and office from 1883 to 1903. The elm was an important feature of the Fairsted landscape until 2011, when it had to be taken down due to disease. An American Elm thought to have been planted by Olmsted stands on property that was once part of Tosomock Farm, on the corner of Woods of Arden Road and Wakefield Road.

