

Blackgum: *Nyssa sylvatica*

Secondary Names: Black Tupelo, Sourgum, Sour Gum

Leaf Type: Deciduous

Texas Native:

Tree Description: A large forest tree reaching a height of over 100 feet and a trunk that exceeds 3 feet in diameter, with a straight trunk and many horizontal branches of a similar size that form a narrow, oval crown.

Range/Site Description: Occurs in East Texas, usually in moist, well-drained soils, but also on dry slopes with a variety of oaks.

Leaf: Simple, alternate, 2" to 6" long and 1" to 3" wide, oval to elliptical or even oblong, leaf edge without teeth; leaves are shiny, dark green on top, turning brilliant red, orange, and purple in the fall.

Flower: Male and female flowers borne on separate trees or the same tree as long, slender clusters when the leaves are about one-third grown; the male in many-flowered heads, and the female in two or several-flowered clusters.

Fruit: A dark blue drupe, 0.5" long, oval, containing a single hard-shelled stone, borne 2 to 3 in a cluster on a stalk 1" to 2.5" long.

Bark: Smooth and gray on younger trees, developing furrows and flat ridges as the tree ages, with older bark light gray and broken into thick, distinctly squarish blocks.

Wood: Very tough, cross-grained, not durable in contact with the soil, hard to work, and warps easily; used for crossties, basket veneer, box boards, and paper pulp.

Similar Species: Both water tupelo (*Nyssa aquatica*) and swamp tupelo (*N. biflora*) occur in areas of standing water in East Texas and have buttressed trunks. Two-wing silverbell (*Halesia diptera*) is an understory tree with showy white flowers in spring.

Interesting Facts: In the old days, the hollow trunks were cut in sections and used to make bee hives; the flowers produce an excellent "tupelo honey."