

Kentucky coffee tree *Gymnocladus dioicus*

Kingdom: Plantae

Division/Phylum: Magnoliophyta

Class: Magnoliopsida

Order: Fabales

Family: Fabaceae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The Kentucky coffee tree is a deciduous tree that may attain a height of 85 feet and a trunk diameter of two and one-half feet. It has a narrow, rounded crown. The trunk begins to branch a few feet above the ground. The bark is dark gray, furrowed and scaled. The buds are very small and in hairy cavities above the leaf scars. The doubly pinnately compound leaves are arranged alternately along the stem. The many leaflets are oval, pointed at the tip, up to two inches long and about that wide. Each leaflet is dark green above, and yellow green below. Male and female flowers are borne on separate trees in green clusters. Each flower has five, hairy petals. The fruit is a brown, leathery pod, about 10 inches long and two inches wide, containing several seeds in a thick pulp.

BEHAVIORS

The Kentucky coffee tree may be found statewide in Illinois. It grows in low woods. Flowering occurs from May through June. The wood is used for fence posts, as fuel, for making cabinets and for railroad ties. The seeds can be used as a substitute for coffee, however, the pulp is poisonous. This plant is one of the few members of the pea family that does not grow nitrogen-fixing nodules on its roots.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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