

Shagbark Hickory

Carya ovata

Common name:

Shagbark Hickory, Shellbark Hickory (misnamed), Scalybark Hickory

Pronunciation:

KA-ri-a o-VA-ta

Family:

Juglandaceae

Genus:

Carya

"To everyone with a feeling for things American, and for American history, the Shagbark seems like a symbol of the pioneer age, with its hard sinewy limbs and rude, shaggy coat, like the pioneer himself in fringed deerskin hunting shirt. And the roaring heat of its fires, the tang of its nuts -- that wild manner that in every autumn it once cast lavishly before the feet -- stand for the days of forest abundance."

"When the Indians were gone and the white men came, "nut cracks" were a popular diversion of pioneer boys and girls. The tough hickory nuts, and black walnuts too, were cracked with hammers and flat irons and then shelled. As many were eaten at the time as young appetites could endure -- which is a great deal -- and the rest saved for sale and for future consumption. Quite as important as the nuts at these cracks seemed the kissing games played by the children and the courting that got done among the older boys and girls."

"The fuel value of Shagbark is higher than that of any other American wood except Locust. A cord of Hickory is almost the equivalent in thermal units of a ton of anthracite, and even today cost less. In our times of scarcity, it is horrifying to think that untold millions of cords of this wood were chucked into the hearths and stoves of pioneers. The log cabins, notoriously drafted if not perfectly constructed, were kept warm by a roaring fire day and night, a large part of the year, and Shagbark was the favorite wood to feed this Moloch."

(excerpts from Donald Culross Peattie, *A Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America*)

Quick ID Tips:

- Very shaggy bark peeling off trunk in long, curling strips

- 5 leaflets on a large 11" compound leaf
- Leaves may have an apple-like aroma when crushed
- Large, 2" fruit splits to base and has 4 ribs from top to bottom

Details:

- This broadleaf deciduous tree grows 70-90 ft. tall with a straight trunk, often free of lower branches below a narrow crown. In some cases, saplings may divide near the ground in an open location and have a spreading habit.
- Bark is dark gray, separating into long strips which peel away at the lower or both ends, giving the tree a shaggy appearance (hence its name). Young bark is smooth and gray striped; peeling away from the trunk can be observed in mature saplings.
- Leaves are alternate, pinnately compound, 8-14" long with 5 leaflets. Leaflets are 5" long, widest in the middle, elliptic to oblong-lanceolate, with a pointed tip and finely toothed margins with several tufts of hairs per tooth. The terminal leaflet is often conspicuously larger than the others.
- Leaf color is deep green, which sometimes appears as slightly yellowish green. Lower surface is paler and sparsely hairy. Fall color is bright yellow (candle-flame) to golden brown.
- Fruit is almost round, wider than long, and 2" in length. Fruits grow solitary or in pairs, with a thick and woody green husk. The husk splits freely to the base when ripe, revealing a light-colored nut that is slightly flattened, usually 4-angled, has a thin shell, and encloses sweet and edible kernels.
- Nut production begins when the tree is around 20 years old and bumper crops occur every 2-3 years. Nuts are important food for many species of wildlife, from birds to mammals.
- Terminal buds are large and dark brown, 3/4" long, obtuse, hairy, and broadly egg-shaped.
- Prefers a sunny location and dry, upland slopes as well as the borders of swamps in northern areas. In southern areas, it is found in well-drained rich lowlands.
- Hardy in USDA Zones 4-8. Its native range extends from Quebec to Minnesota and south to Georgia and Texas.
- *ovata*: ovate or egg-shaped
- "That Hickory was a symbol of strength in the pioneer mind is attested by the nickname of "Old Hickory" given to General Andrew Jackson. It was accorded him when, a major general of militia, he received callous orders from the Secretary of War to discharge his troops in the War of 1812 at Natchez when

they were 500 miles from home. Flatly refusing, he marched his men back along the Natchez trace to Tennessee in order that they might be mustered out near their homes. Sharing their poor fare with them, sleeping with them on the hard ground, he rung from the backwoodsmen their admiration. "He's tough," admitted the tough boys from the Hickory groves, "tough as Hickory." "Old Hickory" they dubbed him, and the name chanted him to the White House. Today he sleeps beneath six towering Shagbarks in his grave in "The Hermitage" garden."

(excerpt from Donald Culross Peattie, A Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America)



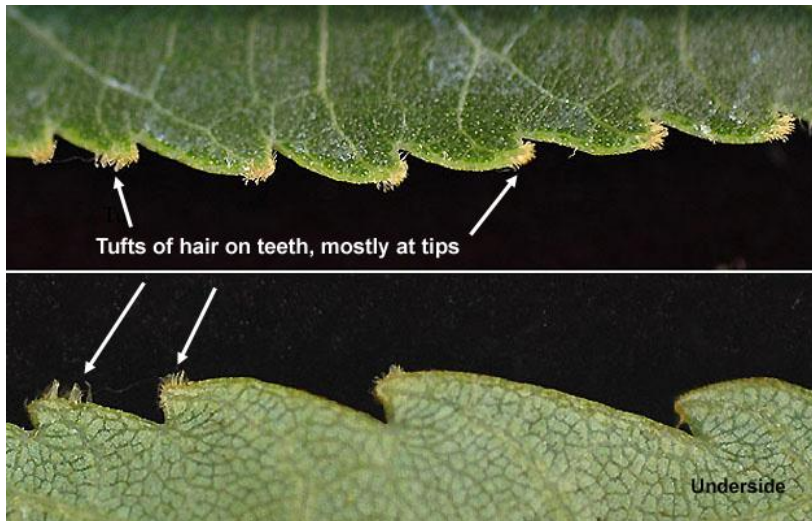
plant habit



leaves and fruit



leaves



leaf margins with tufts of hair on rounded teeth



developing fruit



fall color



fruit and buds, fall nuts



shaggy bark

Sources:

- Oregon State University Landscape Plants, <https://landscapeplants.oregonstate.edu/plants/carya-ovata>
- Charles Fergus, *Trees of New England, A Natural History* (Globe Pequot Press 2005)
- David Sibley, *The Sibley Guide to Trees* (Knopf 2009)