



## TREES & plants

# Yellowwood

Yellowwood is a medium- to large-sized tree, 30 to 50 feet high, with smooth bark, large hanging clusters of fragrant white flowers, and clear yellow fall color. Choose a yellowwood tree for excellent shade in a small- to medium-sized landscape. Note that the branches of the yellowwood are highly susceptible to ice storm damage. It was formerly known as *Cladrastis lutea*.



**Botanical name:** *Cladrastis kentukea*

**All Common Names:** Yellowwood, American yellowwood

**Family (English):** Pea

**Family (Botanic):** Fabaceae (formerly Leguminosae)

**Planting Site:** Residential and parks, City parkway, Wide median

**Tree or Plant Type:** Tree

**Foliage:** Deciduous (seasonally loses leaves)

**Native Locale:** North America

**Landscape Uses:** Parkway/street, Patio/sidewalk, Shade tree, Specimen

**Size Range:** Large tree (more than 40 feet), Medium tree (25-40 feet)

**Mature Height:** 30-50 feet

**Mature Width:** 40-55 feet

**Light Exposure:** Full sun (6 hrs direct light daily)

**Hardiness Zones:** Zone 4, Zone 5 (Chicago), Zone 6, Zone 7, Zone 8

**Soil Preference:** Moist, well-drained soil

**Acid Soils:** Tolerant

**Alkaline Soils:** Tolerant

**Salt Spray:** Moderately Tolerant

**Soil Salt:** Moderately Tolerant

**Drought Conditions:** Moderately Tolerant

**Poor Drainage:** Moderately Tolerant

**Planting Considerations:** Highly susceptible to ice damage, May be difficult to find in nurseries, Weak wood and branch structure

**Ornamental Interest:** Spring blossoms, Fall color, Fragrant flowers, Persistent fruit/seeds, Showy flowers, Attractive bark

**Season of Interest:** Late spring, Early fall, Mid fall

**Flower Color & Fragrance:** Fragrant, White

**Shape or Form:** Round

**Growth Rate:** Moderate

**Transplants Well:** No

**More Information:**

**Tree & Plant Care**

Use corrective pruning to eliminate weak branch forks when young, but do not prune in early spring due to excessive bleeding. Tolerant of high pH soils.

**Disease, pests, and problems**

Susceptible to ice storm damage, can develop splitting at the crotch of the tree.  
Susceptible to verticillium wilt and borer damage.

**Native geographic location and habitat**

Native to North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Also scattered areas of IL, IN, and southern states.  
Found in rich, well-drained limestone soils in river valleys, slopes and ridges.

**Bark color and texture**

Smooth, beech-like gray to brown bark. Interior wood is yellow.

**Leaf or needle arrangement, size, shape, and texture**

Alternate, oddly-pinnate compound leaves, 8 to 12 inches long; leaflets 2 to 3 inches long, ovate, with entire margins; bright green in summer, turning clear yellow in fall.

**Flower arrangement, shape, and size**

Drooping clusters (panicles) of white pea-type flowers. Flowers are fragrant.  
Clusters are 8 to 14 inches long and resemble white wisteria.  
Flowering tends to occur in alternate years (heavy flowering one year and lighter flowering the next).

**Fruit, cone, nut, and seed descriptions**

Flat, papery, brown pod containing 4 to 6 seeds, 2 ½ to 4 inches long. Pods often persist into winter.

**Cultivars and their differences**

**Pink-flowered Yellowwood** (*Cladrastis lutea* 'Rosea' (syn. Perkins Pink): A light pink, 10 to 15 inch long, pendulous flowers. Rounded crown reaching 20 to 25 feet high. May be difficult to find in nursery.



Location of *Cladrastis kentukea* (Yellowwood) at the Arboretum

VIEW MAP