Common Cottonwood



Tree Type

This tree is deciduous and will lose its foliage for the winter.

Planting

Makes for a great shade tree, especially away from homes or structures. Lovely in parks or in large open lawns. Well suited for a wet or low spot in the yard.

Watering

Once established, the tree is somewhat drought resistant but would benefit a deep watering with infrequent rainfall.

Pruning

At any time of the year, dead branches can be removed. Wait until late winter to prune living branches and thin out the crown as the tree grows into maturity.

Preferences

This tree prefers full sun meaning it needs at least 6 hours of direct, unfiltered sunlight per day. Common Cottonwood prefers moist, well drained soil but can tolerate both wet and dry site such as sandy or clay soil.

Attributes

Common Cottonwood grows to heights of 50 to 75 ft with a spread of 50 to 75 ft at maturity. It can grow more than four feet a year. The eastern cottonwood can be seen throughout Minnesota's landscapes in the urban environment as well as natural areas. The tree is short-lived, very fast-growing, and can take over an open area if left alone. It develops first as a narrow, conical crown that with maturity becomes broad and open supported by a massive trunk. Its bark is a light gray on young trees and dark gray and rough on older trees. Leaves will turn yellow to yellowish-orange in the fall. The seeds are enclosed in a cluster of white cottony hairs that carry them for long distances.

Wildlife Value

Cottonwood is a vital keystone species in riparian and wetland ecosystems, supporting hundreds of species. This tree is a common nesting site of raptors such bald eagles, ospreys, and great horned owls. Truck hollows provide habitat for pileated woodpeckers and other cavity dwellers.

When newly planted trees go without enough water, growth slows to a crawl. This delays establishment and may even lead to the death of leaves, branches, roots or the whole tree.

For the most part, trees can only take up water from soil that is in direct contact with roots. Even in the best conditions, newly transplanted trees use water from a relatively small volume of soil. To make matters worse, roots of bare root, balled & burlaped, and spaded trees are cut during transplanting.

Within two to three days after spring or summer planting, the soil around the roots of trees dries enough to impede root growth. Newly transplanted trees in the Midwest benefit from daily watering for the first one to two weeks. Apply 1 to 1½ gallons of water for each inch of trunk diameter. After that, water trees every two to three days for the next two to three months and then weekly until established. The more closely you match your watering frequency to the optimum, the quicker trees become established.
Reduce watering in cool, cloudy, or wet weather if the soil is poorly drained (soil drains less than 3/4 inches per hour). Eliminate daily irrigation in poorly drained soil.
After it rains, stop watering until the rainwater drains from the soil. Stop watering in the autumn once leaves fall from trees.

Mulch reduces evaporation and conserves water. An investment in frequent watering helps insure against tree death and the cost of replanting trees.

