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Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*)

Nebraska Forest Service

Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) has long been a favorite for city planting and it has found a home as a specimen tree in the landscape. It is undoubtedly one of the most distinct of all deciduous trees. The bright green fan shaped leaves are unique among all trees and turn a golden yellow in the fall. Ginkgo has been dated back over 150 million years and at one time was native to North America. Leaf prints can be found in fossils and thus the tree is sometimes called a “living fossil”.



Ginkgo is a large and majestic shade tree with age, and is very adaptable to harsh sites, especially those with dry, poor soils. It grows up to 80 feet tall by 60 feet wide when found in the open, with a slow to medium growth rate. Its shape is upright pyramidal and sparsely branched when young, becoming upright spreading and very dense at maturity. Its lower branches become pendulous with age, especially those of the female trees that have repeatedly borne heavy crops of fruits. These fruits are the one downside of Ginkgo. The tree is dioecious, which means that there are both male and female trees. The female produces abundant fleshy fruit that has a rather rank odor. It is best to purchase the male tree which is most common in the nursery trade. Ginkgo has virtually no insect or disease enemies.



The Ginkgo was discovered by explorers visiting temples in southeastern China and Japan several hundred years ago. It was brought back to Europe and North America where it has flourished ever since. The tree grows well in all of eastern Nebraska. It has a moderate growth rate and tends to be a little “leggy” when it is young. One of the unusual attributes of Ginkgo is that in the fall the leaves usually all drop over a two or three day period.

Ginkgo is also called the Maidenhair Tree and the word Ginkgo comes from the Japanese word “ginkyo” meaning silver apricot. Biloba refers to the two lobed leaves and is taken from the Chinese.