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Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)

Nebraska Forest Service

Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), once a native to the southern Appalachian region of the Eastern United States, has now spread throughout most of the world. It can be found along the Missouri river corridor in Nebraska and has moved a little to the west. It is an aggressive and rapidly growing tree where growing conditions are good. Black locust has been used in the east for erosion control in road cuts, abandoned fields, and strip mined areas. The tree colonizes by seeds and it also suckers from roots.



Black locust can grow to heights of 50 feet or more but on most Nebraska sites it falls a little short of that.

The Latin name, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, is taken from the French herbalist Jean Robin and the Greek word “akakia” meaning Egyptian thorn tree. It is thought that near the end of the 18th century the botanist for France’s Henry IV, Jean Robin, or his son Vespasien, sent seeds of black locust, probably from Louisiana, to Europe in the early 17th century. Black locust has value as railroad ties, fence posts, and other uses that require contact with the ground. It is highly resistant to rot but internal decay can be a problem. The wood is olive-green in color before drying.

Black locust is a legume or member of the bean family. It will fix nitrogen in the soil and this is why it is good for erosion control and on disturbed sites. Over time, black locust will improve poorer soils. Black locust prefers soils that are rich but will grow on poorer soils as mentioned. It is tolerant of salts and pollutants. Planting should be done on open sites in full sun.

In Nebraska the biggest threat to black locust is weather. Dry, hot summers will often cause the tree to look a little ragged toward the end of summer and locust borer can also be an issue.

Black locust has a compound leaf that is similar to honeylocust although the two are not related. Springtime flowers are pendulous, white and fragrant producing a very pleasant, almost tropical odor. Fall color is yellow to gold and not very prominent. The tree does have small spurs or thorns that are stout and sharp enough to flatten a tire. Seeds are produced in a short pod and are easily germinated.



Black locust is not a commonly planted tree but should be considered on sites where soils have been disturbed and restoration is part of the overall plan.