

Balsam Poplar



Balsam poplar (*Populus balsamifera*)

The Balsam poplar is something like Narrowleaf cottonwood but with broader heart-shaped leaves. It prefers cool, wet locations, from 6000 feet elevation to treeline, along streams and on margins of boggy places. It is common in the Canadian forests right up to the tundra, and in the north woods of the U.S. such as those in Minnesota. Its appearance in Colorado represents its most southerly extent. It is widely scattered through the mountains of northern and central Colorado. It seldom grows over 50 feet high; it may reach 1 to 2 feet in trunk diameter, and has an open narrow crown. Like other cottonwoods it requires full sun for the seedlings to grow.

The scientific name is *Populus balsamifera*. It was first described for science by Linnaeus in 1750 in Europe. This is circumpolar tree species of the northern hemisphere, like the aspen and boxelder, which are found in the cool northern forests right around the globe.

Identification

Balsam poplar leaves are dark shiny green but quite pale beneath. The leaves are 3 to 7 inches long; 1 to 4 inches broad, and fine-toothed on the edges. Note: leaf stalks are round (not flattened like Plains or Rio Grande cottonwoods), or notched on top.

Stems and twigs are dark brown or red-brown.

End buds large (5/8 to 1 inch long); gummy or waxy; have a spicy fragrance, camphor-like, in spring if squeezed.

The bark is gray-green or brown and smooth on younger trees; dark or gray and furrowed with broad ridges in older trees.

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