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2. Tulip Poplar
315 W. Margaret Ln.
3. Kentucky Coffee Tree
Riverwalk
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Nash and Kollock St.
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Legend

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TOWN OF
HILLSBOROUGH

Treasure Trees Self-Guided Walk



Hillsborough loves its trees! The town was one of the first in North Carolina to be named a USA Tree City. The Hillsborough Tree Board has been active for several decades, and each year the town celebrates Arbor Day and recognizes outstanding trees through the Treasure Trees Program.

Inside is a map and information on Hillsborough's Treasure Trees. Along the self-guided walk, discover a town with a beautiful tree canopy, friendly people and a downtown district architecturally diverse and nationally recognized for its historic significance.

Nominate a Treasure Tree:
www.hillsboroughnc.gov.

1. American Sycamore

Platanus occidentalis (“western plane tree”) is readily recognized by its mottled exfoliating bark. The splitting of the bark as the trunk grows is more visible in the green, white, and brown bark. Sycamores grow 98 to 130 feet tall and often have multiple trunks, which typically become hollow animal dens.

2. Tulip Poplar

Liriodendron tulipifera (Greek for “lily tree carrying tulips”) is related to the magnolia and not the lily, poplar, or tulip. It is called fiddle tree for its leaf shape, tulip tree for the leaf’s silhouette, and poplar or yellow poplar due to its fluttering leaf motion. The fast-growing tree reaches 70 to 100 feet, often without limbs for much of its height, making it desired for timber. The tree produces much nectar, which honey producers enjoy.

3. Kentucky Coffee Tree

Gymnocladus dioica has large, leathery seed filled pods and large leaves made up of smaller leaflets. Its name refers to its use by early settlers, who roasted the seeds and brewed them as a substitute for coffee. Some Native American tribes found medical uses for parts of the tree, and the hard seeds were widely used as dice in a game found in many pre-colonial cultures. Unless roasted, the seed is poisonous for both humans and animals.

4. Eastern Redbuds

Cercis canadensis is a strikingly conspicuous tree in early spring because its pink to reddish

purple flowers bloom before the tree leaves form. This ornamental tree grows rapidly but is short-lived. It is usually multi-trunked in the wild, with a vase shape and a rounded crown that reaches about 20 feet tall and 20 feet wide at maturity when found in the open.

5. Willow Oak

Quercus phellos is a fast-growing native tree common in river floodplains or rich, upland soil. It is hardy in zones 5-9 and ranges from the New Jersey coast south to Northwest Florida and west to East Texas and Southern Illinois. The tree usually grows 60 to 80 feet with a 3- to 4-foot-diameter trunk. Its leaves turn a pale yellow to orange-brown before dropping in the fall, and the tree produces many small acorns that are relished by wildlife.

6. Flowering Dogwood

Cornus florida is known for its showy flowers, our state flower. The flowers are modified leaves called “bracts.” Because the four paired bracts are cross-shaped, the tree became known as the tree on which Christ was crucified.

7. Eastern Red Cedar

Juniperus virginiana is a coniferous evergreen most commonly found in the Piedmont. Not a cedar but a juniper, this tree usually reaches 40 to 50 feet but may be larger. The needles are pointed and prickly. On the female tree, the fruit is a bluish color, globular shaped, and a favorite food source for birds. Small cones up to a third inch long are found on the male tree. The bark is reddish -brown and peels into long fibrous strips.

8. Crape Myrtles

Lagerstroemia, nicknamed “lilac of the South,” this beautiful tree is know for its abundance of flowers with petals that have a wrinkled “crepe-like” texture. It is a hardy shrub with a tree like form in hot and sunny climates. After the tree is established, it is known to be drought tolerant.

9. Southern Red Oak

Quercus falcata, also known as Spanish oak, is drought resistant and ranges from New York to Florida. It usually reaches 82 to 98 feet but can reach 115 to 125 feet. Its leaves have three to five strongly pointed lobes, while mature trees could have up to seven lobes. The center lobe is longer, resembling a turkey foot and allowing the oak to be distinguished from other red oaks. Its acorn is short, with a bright orange-brown cap a third to half of the seed length.

10. Pecan

Carya illinoensis is native to America, originally growing from Illinois and Iowa to Texas and Louisiana. Planting has extended this range, particularly to the southeast. The deciduous tree of the hickory family grows 60 to 130 feet, and its 39- to 75-foot canopy makes it excellent for shade. Specimens live over 300 years. The tree is monoecious, with both male and female parts.

11. Dawn Redwood

Metasequoia glyptostroboides was discovered and hailed as a living fossil in the 1940s in China. It is related to the famous redwoods and sequoias of California. The shortest of the three, it quickly can grow over 130 feet. Due to its DNA, the tree has been transferred from the cypress to sequoia family.

12. American Beech

Fagus grandiflora (“beech tree with big foliage”) is known as the grey or silver beech. It grows from Nova Scotia and Wisconsin to northern Florida and the Caribbean. This slow-growing deciduous tree grows 66 to 110 feet and is monoecious, with flowers of both sexes. A short stem attaches the leaves to the twig, which is distinctive in winter, with overlapping scales in two rows on the buds.

13. Southern Magnolia

Magnolia grandiflora was imported in 1726, and many varieties are found throughout the world. Typical large specimens can reach 90 and occasionally 114 feet. The striking pyramidal-shaped evergreen tree is characterized by its large, dark green leaves and its large white, citron-scented flowers.

14. China Fir

Cunninghamia lanceolata (“tree named for an English botanist, with lance-shaped leaf”) is an evergreen conifer of the cypress family. It is a non-native species brought to America in the early 1800s from Southeast Asia and China, where it grows up to 165 feet.

15. Red Maple

Acer rubrum has spectacular deep red fall leaves and the greatest north-south range of any tree species living entirely in the eastern forests. The largest red maple in the United States is 141 feet.

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Tree Board Spotlights Kentucky Coffeetree Grove with Treasure Tree Designation

HILLSBOROUGH — The Hillsborough Tree Board has selected a small grove of Kentucky coffeetree saplings on the Riverwalk greenway for its 2022 Treasure Tree designation. The grove is located on the north side of the Eno River near the Weaver Street Market entrance to Riverwalk.

“Kentucky coffeetree is one of the rarest native tree species,” said Justin Bennett of the North Carolina Forest Service, who confirmed the identification of the trees with on-site examination.

The identification of this grove was initially a mystery for Tree Board members. After some initial misidentification, the puzzle was solved by Katy Porter, a volunteer helping to remove invasive species along Riverwalk. She found documentation of the trees on the Vascular Plants of North Carolina search engine, which is maintained by the North Carolina State Parks. The documentation noted that only two non-cultivated populations of these Kentucky coffeetrees have been identified in the state. One was identified on the banks of the Eno River in Hillsborough in 1951. The other was identified in Chapel Hill’s Battle Creek Park in 2006.

The Kentucky coffeetree, *Gymnocladus dioicus*, is a unique tree with large, leathery 6- to 12-inch pods and very large leaves made up of smaller leaflets. Its common name refers to its use by early settlers, who roasted the seeds encased in the pods and brewed them as a substitute for coffee, which was expensive and hard to find outside of coastal cities. Some Native American tribes found medical uses for parts of the tree, and the hard seeds were widely used as dice in a game found in many pre-colonial cultures.

Unless roasted, the seed is poisonous for both humans and animals. For this reason, the tree is considered an ecological anachronism, like the Osage orange and honey locust trees, which also have fruit that is inedible to modern wildlife. It is thought that extinct large American herbivores, like the woolly mammoth, once ate and dispersed the seed. Coffeetree seeds no longer spread from the mother tree except along streams where they may be transported downstream. Although the fruit is toxic to animals and birds, the tree still has wildlife value as a larval host for both the bicolored and bisected honey locust moths.

Because the leaves of this tree are late to emerge and early to fall, the Kentucky coffeetree is without leaves, or naked, five or six months of the year. Its Greek genus name, *Gymnocladus*, means “naked branch.” The tree’s bipinnately compound leaves can reach up to 3 feet long and 2

feet wide, with numerous 2-inch leaflets, making them one of the largest leaves of our native trees. The coffeetree can reach a height of 60 to 75 feet with a 40- to 50-foot spread at maturity.

Although widely distributed, the Kentucky coffeetree is a rare forest tree and is mostly found in small groves or as a single specimen, primarily in fertile bottomlands in the Midwest. With its bold form, contorted branching, unique bark and decorative clusters of large pods, Kentucky coffeetree has a distinctive profile. It is a beautiful and easy-to-grow large shade tree, tolerant of many soil types, flooding, drought and storms. Tree expert Michael Dirr writes, “To know her is to love her. A wonderful native species that tolerates the worst stress nature and humanity can impose.”

More information

The Tree Board’s [Treasure Trees Program](#) is intended to create awareness of and give recognition to the preservation of significant trees in the Hillsborough area. See the [Tree Board](#) page for information on nominating a tree or for a brochure on a self-guided walk of previous treasure trees.

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A grove of Kentucky coffeetree saplings has been designated as the Tree Board's choice for the 2022 Treasure Tree designation. The grove is located along the Eno River near Riverwalk's Weaver Street Market entrance.