

Gordonia lasianthus: Loblolly-Bay¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

Introduction

A native American, usually single-trunked, evergreen tree, Loblolly-Bay reaches a height of 35 to 60 feet with a columnar or pyramidal, very open growth habit. The two to seven-inch-long, glossy, dark green leaves are a light grey color on the underside, giving a two-toned effect in the wind. Although evergreen, several individual leaves at a time will turn a brilliant scarlet color in the fall adding to its attractiveness. The white, two to three-inch-wide, five-petalled, cup-shaped flowers open from late spring through summer and are very attractive but sparsely produced throughout the canopy.

General Information

Scientific name: *Gordonia lasianthus*

Pronunciation: gor-DOE-nee-uh lay-zee-ANTH-us

Common name(s): Loblolly-Bay, Sweet-Bay

Family: *Theaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7A through 9B (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: specimen; espalier; reclamation

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree



Figure 1. Middle-aged *Gordonia lasianthus*: Loblolly-Bay

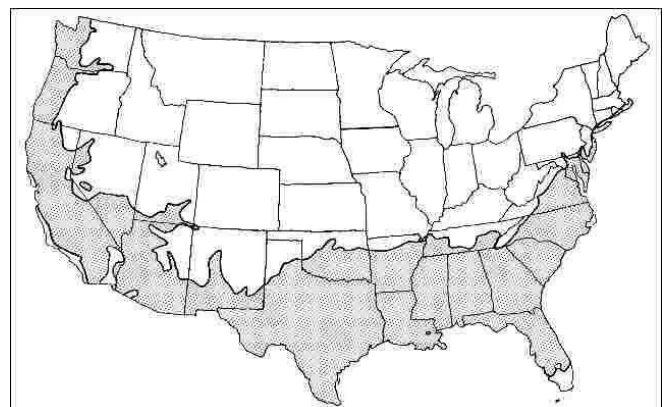


Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 35 to 60 feet

Spread: 10 to 15 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: columnar

Crown density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrulate

Leaf shape: oblong, oblanceolate

Leaf venation: pinnate, reticulate, brachidodrome

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: red

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray

Flower characteristics: very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

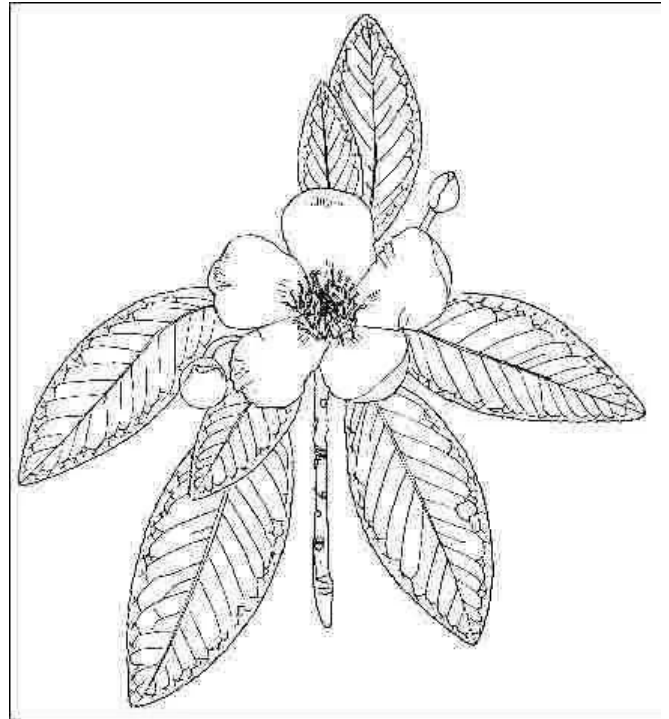


Figure 3. Foliage

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns

Pruning requirement: little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown, green

Current year twig thickness: medium

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: shade tolerant, full sun, partial sun or partial shade

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; acidic; extended flooding

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: none

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: yes

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

Use and Management

Loblolly-Bay makes an attractive specimen planting and its light, airy growth habit lends itself well to smaller, partially enclosed locations. In moist soils, Loblolly-Bay naturalizes well and is well-suited to the low-maintenance landscape. Due to the shape of the crown, it makes a suitable tree in urban areas with restricted, narrow overhead space, and should do well as a street tree, although it has not been extensively used yet.

Preferring partial shade and moist soil, Loblolly-Bay can tolerate full sun only with sufficient moisture. Loblolly-Bay has a shallow root system and will die if not watered

during periods of drought. It is found in the wild most often growing in wet sites in the shade of maples, cypress and pines. It is well-suited for planting in boggy and other poorly drained soils. It is not salt-tolerant. Not for dry climates.

Propagation is by seeds which germinate well after stratification, or by cuttings.

The cultivar 'Variegata' has white and green foliage, white flowers.

Pests

Pest problems are borers in weakened trees, aphids, and caterpillars.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.

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