

# TOP 10 TREES

## For small to medium lots

BOONE COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



### American hornbeam ◆

**Botanical Name:** *Carpinus caroliniana*

**Height:** 20–30 feet

**Spread:** 20–30 feet

**Foliage:** Thin, simple, dark green leaves that turn various colors.

**Care needs:** Needs moist soil; does well in shade; difficult to transplant.

**Purpose:** Shade; fall color; street tree (a tree that is hardy enough to thrive in an urban environment or along a street)

**This native tree is known as “musclewood,”** from the sinewy appearance of its blue-gray trunk and stems, as well as “ironwood.” Tony Nold, owner of The Plant Kingdom in Louisville (with his wife Shelly, this magazine’s garden columnist), calls it “a good, tough urban tree.” Kristopher Stone of the Boone County Arboretum calls it a good smaller alternative to beech (it has similarly smooth bark).



### American yellowwood □

**Botanical Name:** *Cladrastis kentuckea*

**Height:** 30–50 feet

**Spread:** 40–50 feet

**Foliage:** Compound leaves have 7–11 alternately spaced leaflets; clusters of white flowers appear every 2–3 years; turns yellow in the fall.

**Care needs:** Best growth in full sun to partial shade; needs pruning to form strong branch angles, but should be pruned only in the summer.

**Purpose:** Shade, specimen tree (a tree you select for some unique characteristic that appeals to you or particularly compliments your site; is planted alone in a landscape to stand out for its particular merits, i.e., good shade, great shape, great fall color, interesting bark, spectacular flowering)

**Not just native, but** Kentuckian through and through — check out the botanical name; the tallest example in the country is in Jefferson County. While it’s rare in the wild, it’s easy enough to find in nurseries, and has many fans among horticulturists (it was a 2004 Theodore Klein Plant Award winner). It’s tolerant of Kentucky’s limestone-based soils; its leaves turn yellow after many other trees have already defoliated. Fun fact: Indians used its wood to make a yellow dye.



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### Pawpaw ◆

**Botanical Name:** *Asimina triloba*

**Height:** 15–20 feet

**Spread:** 15–20 feet

**Foliage:** Long, thick, drooping leaves; turns yellow in the fall; purple flowers.

**Care needs:** Moist, slightly acidic soil; does well in full sun or shade.

**Purpose:** Shade; fruit; street tree

**This native tree produces a fruit that’s** universally described as “custardy.” Tony Nold calls its foliage “tropical-looking” (it comes from a tropical family). It’s known for attracting butterflies. In its native habitat, it forms suckering colonies from its roots. Kentucky State University is a leading center of research on the pawpaw, which may have potential uses in cancer therapy and as an organic insecticide.



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### Japanese tree lilac □

**Botanical Name:** *Syringa reticulata* ‘Ivory Silk’

**Height:** 20–30 feet

**Spread:** 15–25 feet

**Foliage:** Simple leaves 3–6 inches long; fragrant white flowers bloom in early summer; poor fall color (brownish–green).

**Care needs:** Best in full sun in moist, well-drained soil, but adaptable to many soil conditions.

**Purpose:** Street tree, specimen tree, flowering tree

**This tough plant is considered to be the most trouble-free of lilacs.** It blooms early in its life, and profusely, in large terminal clusters. Stone prefers a less-used variety called China Snow Pekin Lilac (*syringa pekinensis*)—it has a mahogany red bark that peels off in curls that he prefers to the bark of the Japanese.

### Sweetbay magnolia □

**Botanical Name:** *Magnolia virginiana*

**Height:** 15–25 feet

**Spread:** 10–20 feet

**Foliage:** Elliptical leaves stay green for most of the year; creamy white, lemon-scented flowers, smaller than those of other magnolias, bloom in late spring and occasionally during the summer.

**Care needs:** Wet to swampy soil, full sun to partial shade; needs acidic soil.

**Purpose:** Specimen tree; screening

### Another tough urban tree, with good drought

resistance. It sometimes takes on a low, multi-trunked, shrublike appearance. Stone likes the ‘Northern Belle’ cultivar, which he says is more upright and narrower than other sweetbay magnolias and is especially hardy in the cold (it keeps its leaves well below zero).



BOONE COUNTY ARBORETUM

## TOP 10 TREES For large lots

### Ginkgo/maidenhair tree □

**Botanical Name:** *Ginkgo biloba*

**Height:** 40–80 feet

**Spread:** 30–40 feet

**Foliage:** Distinctive emerald green, fan-shaped leaves turn brilliant golden yellow in fall.

**Care needs:** Adaptable, but does best in full sun; prefers deep sandy soils and moderate moisture.

**Purpose:** Street tree, specimen tree, shade

**This Chinese native is the only survivor of a prehistoric order of trees, kept alive into our time by being tended in Buddhist temple gardens.** You want to get a male tree: the female has an unpleasant odor (it’s prohibited to plant female ginkgo trees in public right-of-way easements or along roads in a number of cities, including Louisville and Lexington). “They’re such darn tough trees,” says Stone—drought-tolerant and well-suited to urban areas. The ginkgo’s eccentric branches usually spread into a rounded form, but there’s a narrow variety (or cultivar) called “Princeton Sentry.”

### Japanese Zelkova ◆

**Botanical Name:** *Zelkova serrata*

**Height:** 50–80 feet

**Spread:** 40–50 feet

**Foliage:** Pointed, elliptically shaped leaves; fall color can be showy, with a mix of red, orange, yellow, and purple.

**Care needs:** Prefers full sun and well-drained, deep, moist soil; adaptable to wide range of pHs.

**Purpose:** Shade tree, street tree

**This vase-shaped tree, with its upright arching limbs, is used widely as a substitute for American elm.** The bark can exfoliate in a pattern that shows the orange inner bark peeking through. It’s highly drought-tolerant. Look for individuals with well-spaced limbs to ensure strong branching (the limbs have a tendency to clump together at a single point on the trunk).



SHELLY NOLD



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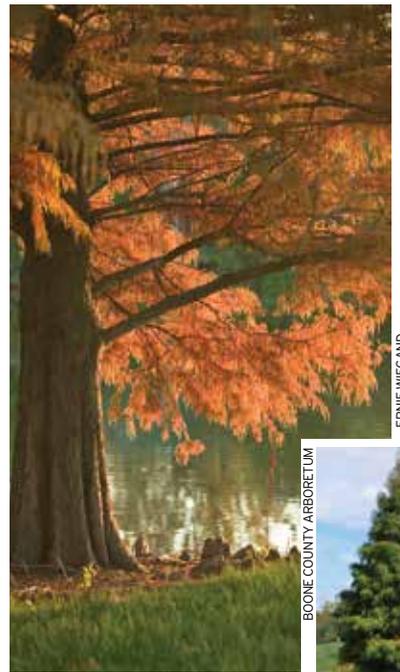
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## Swamp white oak ♦

**Botanical Name:** *Quercus bicolor*  
**Height:** 50–60 feet  
**Spread:** 50–60 feet  
**Foliage:** Shiny, dark green leaves that turn yellow and red; 1-inch oval acorns.  
**Care needs:** Grows in wet or dry soils; prefers acidic pH.  
**Purpose:** Shade, specimen, interesting bark, fall beauty

**White oaks are a more disease-resistant group of oaks, and this native oak is one of the faster-growing. It's ice- and windstorm-resistant (surviving the storms of 2008 and 2009 quite well) and tolerant of high-pH soils. The exfoliating gray-brown bark on its branches provides excellent winter interest, and it's long-lived (lasting up to 300 years).**



ERNIE WIEGAND



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## Green Giant Arborvitae ♦

**Botanical Name:** *Thuja (standishii x plicata)* 'Green Giant'  
**Height:** 40–60 feet  
**Spread:** 10–15 feet  
**Foliage:** Thin delicate needles, densely packed.  
**Care needs:** Adaptable to many soil types; needs little pruning.  
**Purpose:** Windbreak

**This hybrid grows tall, narrow, and fast:** Kristopher Stone cites one at the Boone County Arboretum that was 4 or 5 feet tall in 2002 and is now 35 feet. It has a stately, narrow, formal shape—Stone compares it to an upside-down ice cream cone. Maintains dark, green color, and its foliage has a dark green color and is slightly shiny.



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## Bald cypress □

**Botanical Name:** *Taxodium distichum*  
**Height:** 50–70 feet  
**Spread:** 20–30 feet  
**Foliage:** Short, soft needles that emerge bright yellow-green, darken in the summer, and turn russet in the fall.  
**Care needs:** Full sun; prefers wet soils but will adapt to dry; prefers acidic soil.  
**Purpose:** Shade tree, screening

**This is one of several conifers that shed their needles. In the wild, they can top 100 feet tall; in very wet settings, they grow the unique extra roots called “knees” that are believed to help anchor them to the soil. The pond cypress, *Taxodium ascendens*, is a related tree that Stone believes has “an even more fine-textured look and more narrow growth habit to it” than the bald cypress but is used less often.**