

Highland PARK

PLANTS AND TREES

By Melissa McMasters

Plants in urban parks come from a variety of places. Some are natives found naturally within the Pittsburgh region while others have traveled greater distances. Some were brought into the country intentionally by people and some unintentionally, having hitched a ride as seeds hiding in other plant stock.

Here is a sample of the common plants found throughout Pittsburgh's great parks, such as goldenrod, and some that are focal points at Highland Park, such as the sweetgum trees growing on Mount Bigelow and behind the reservoir.

AMERICAN BEECH TREE (*Fagus grandifolia*)



By Jill Kyle

This species of beech is native to eastern North America. It grows 20-35' tall and has a smooth, silvery-gray bark. Leaves are dark green and have very fine teeth. The beech is fairly shade-tolerant and is often found as part of a canopy with other trees such as the sugar maple, yellow birch, and Eastern hemlock. The nuts from the American beech provide food for a wide variety of animals, including deer, raccoons, and squirrels.

EASTERN HEMLOCK TREE (*Tsuga canadensis*)



By Melissa McMasters

Also called Canada hemlock or hemlock spruce, this coniferous tree is the state tree of Pennsylvania. It grows to around 100' tall and is broadly cone-shaped. Bark is brown and scaly and develops crevices with age. Leaves are short (typically 0.6-0.9"), flattened, and slightly toothed. Small ovoid seed cones are usually between 0.6" and 1" in length. These trees prefer cool, humid climates and are shade-tolerant. They have a long lifespan, sometimes taking 300 years to reach maturity.

GINKGO TREE (*Ginkgo biloba*)



By Michael Pettigrew

Called a "living fossil," the ginkgo biloba has no living close relatives. No other plants of its kind are known to have survived after the Pliocene era over 2.5 million years ago. They are tall trees, growing to between 60-115', and sparsely branched when young. Their distinctive leaves are fan-shaped with veins radiating out into the leaf blade. Ginkgoes are sometimes called Maidenhair Trees because of the leaves' resemblance to those of the Maidenhair Fern. The soft, fleshy orange seeds

produced by female trees are not fruits, although their foul odor has earned them the nickname "stinkberries."

HORSE CHESTNUT TREE (*Aesculus hippocastanum*)



By Melissa McMasters

Native to southeast Europe, this tree's common name originated from the false belief that it was a type of chestnut tree and that eating the nuts cured horses of chest pains. The horse chestnut tree reaches heights of over 100' and has a dome-shaped crown. Leaves are compound, with 5-7 leaflets, of which the middle leaf is the largest. The attractive spring flowers are white with a small reddish-pink spot, and they sit erect on the leaves. The fruits are spiky green capsules with a nut-like seed

inside. The nuts, especially younger, less ripe ones, are slightly poisonous to most mammals.

SWEETGUM TREE (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)



By Melissa McMasters

The sweetgum, native to eastern North America, are noted both for their attractive leaf shape and for their spiky fruit. The leaves are five-pointed, glossy, and leathery. They are dark green in the summer and produce a brilliant array of fall colors in red, yellow, orange, and purple. The sweetgum is a mid-size tree that grows between 65 and 115' tall. The 1-1.5" fruits, often called "gumballs," are composed of 40-60 capsules, each with two terminal spikes. Each capsule

holds one or two small seeds which leave small holes in the fruit casing when they are released.

SWEET GOLDENROD (*Solidago odora*)



By Melissa McMasters

Over 100 species of goldenrod are native to North America, and it can be difficult to distinguish between them. They have bright golden bursts of flowers, with hundreds of tiny flower heads. Leaves are alternate and range from linear to lance-shaped, with some degree of serration at the edges. Often blamed for causing hay fever in humans, goldenrod pollen is actually too heavy and sticky to travel far by wind. Ragweed, which blooms during the same late summer period as goldenrod, actually causes most of the allergy problems.

NEW ENGLAND ASTER (*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*)



By Melissa McMasters

This perennial plant is native to North America east of the Rocky Mountains. New England asters can grow up to 6' tall, with stout, hairy stems and lance-shaped leaves. They favor meadows and other moist areas. Their attractive flower heads have a bright orange-yellow disc in the center with ray florets ranging from white to deep purple. The New England aster's flower has around 40 rays, more than most other asters. Flowers bloom in late summer to early fall.

BLACK-EYED SUSAN (*Rudbeckia hirta*)



By Melissa McMasters

Rudbeckia hirta has many cultivars all bearing the common name Black-Eyed Susan, and it is native to much of North America. It grows up to 3' tall on bristly stems, and its lance-shaped alternate leaves are covered with hair. Daisy-like flowers bloom from June to August and feature yellow rays arranged around a round brown cone of disc florets. It seeds freely and is easy to grow, but has become a weed in some areas due to its prolific growth.