

Southern Hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*)

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8/24/2026

While performing maintenance along our James River buffer zone, I noticed a tree with wart-like, cork-like bark that made me wonder what it was. After researching, I learned it was a Southern Hackberry, a native tree in the Elm family, also called Sugarberry or Hackberry.

It is a native tree found from the central to the southeastern United States and in Mexico. It is deciduous and produces drupes (fleshy fruits with a central stone containing the seed, e.g., plums, cherries, almonds, or olives). It is most often found along streams and riverbanks and grows 50 to 70 feet tall. This tough tree tolerates soil compaction, drought, and flooding, making it a reliable choice for various conditions. It thrives in our flood zone, along with several other native species. The fruit is purple, with a brown seed inside. Although messy, the fruit is enjoyed by small mammals and birds, such as robins, mockingbirds, and many others.

This tree also supports local wildlife by hosting several butterfly species, including American Snout, Hackberry Emperor, Mourning Cloak, Tawny Emperor, and Question Mark butterflies, thereby fostering a sense of ecological contribution.

References:

North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox
Native Plant Society of Texas



Photo by Claire Sorenson