Shagbark Hickory Tree (*Carya ovata* (Mill.) K. Koch, Juglandaceae

by Nancy Stephenson, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

8/31/2026

Since I live in a forest, I find so many interesting trees to research. This massive tree has unique bark that forms pointed strips that curl away from the tree, giving it a shaggy appearance, especially noticeable in winter when leaves are absent. In summer, its compound leaves provide lush shade, making it easier to identify during the growing season.

This native tree has a deep taproot and plays a vital role in supporting local ecosystems by providing food and habitat for wildlife. It prefers moist, well-drained soil, but can tolerate alkaline soil and dry sites with occasional flooding and drought. Again, ideal for flood zone areas. They can grow up to 120 feet tall and live 200-300 years. What a massive and long-lived tree. It has compound leaves on a single stem. It produces nuts every 1-3 years inside a thick husk. It can take up to 40 years to produce nuts. It is a member of the Juglandaceae family and produces a small amount of Juglone, the same chemical produced in Black Walnut trees.



Photo by Douglas Goldman

The nuts produced are a good food source for wildlife, such as squirrels, chipmunks, whitetail deer, black bears, wild turkeys, and foxes. It also serves as a host tree for the Hickory horn devil, Luna moth, and Banded hair streak butterfly. Consider planting a Shagbark Hickory in your garden to support local wildlife and attract fascinating insects and birds.

References:

New England Forestry Foundation

University of Minnesota Forestry Outreach

https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/