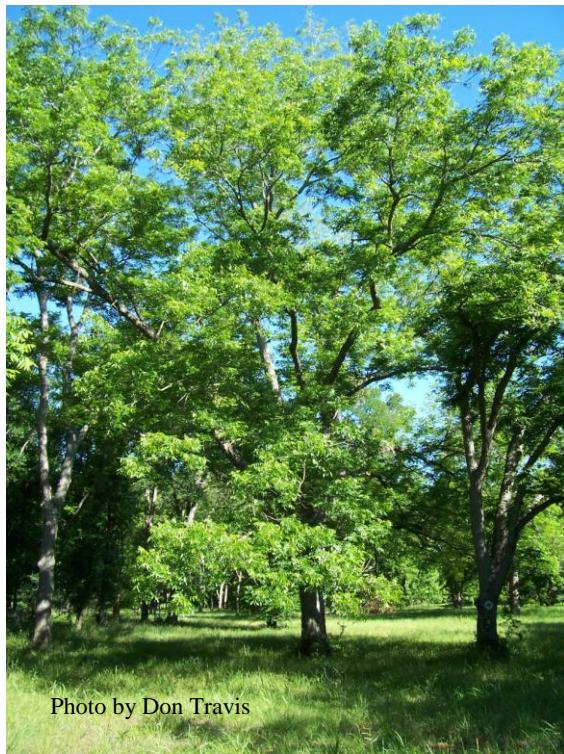


## Native Pecan Tree

Juglandaceae *Carya illinoiensis*



Family – Juglandaceae (Walnut)  
Genus – *Carya* (Hickory)  
Species – *illinoiensis* (Pecan)

### History and Value

The pecan tree is the Texas State Tree, and is the largest species of the genus hickory, in the walnut family. It is native to south-central North America and typically found along rivers, streams and fertile bottomlands. There is evidence of its existence in Texas in pre-historic times.

The word pecan is from an Algonquian word, meaning a nut requiring a stone to crack. Indians used pecans for food long before European settlers arrived. They pressed them to get oils for seasoning, ground them into meal to thicken stews, cooked them with beans, and roasted them for long hunting trips.



The nuts of the pecan have a rich, buttery flavor. They can be eaten fresh or used in cooking, with some favorites being pecan pie and pralines. It is also a favorite of our native wildlife (squirrels, deer, raccoons, foxes, wild turkeys, wood ducks, crows, blue jays, and several other bird species).

It is the only commercially grown nut in Texas, native to 152 counties and grown commercially in some thirty additional counties. Texas is usually the second largest producer of pecans, with average annual yields around 60 million pounds (half native, half improved varieties), although production can vary considerably from year to year. These trees may live and produce nuts for 300 years.

In addition to the pecan nut, the heavy, hard but brittle wood is used in making furniture, in hardwood flooring, as well as flavoring fuel for smoking meats.

Similar species include water hickory (*Carya aquatica*) which grows on very wet sites in East Texas and has narrow leaves and a small, flattened nut; and black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) with more leaflets, leaves that are pubescent underneath, and a large, round fruit without seams on the husk.

**Tree Description:** The pecan tree is a large deciduous tree, typically growing to 65-130 ft in height, rarely to 145 ft. It has a spread of 40-75 ft with a trunk up to 10 ft in diameter.



**Leaves:** The leaves are alternate and pinnate with 9–17 leaflets. They are finely serrated and often curved.

**Flowers and pollination:** Pecans are wind-pollinated and monoecious, with both staminate and pistillate catkins on the same tree. The male catkins are green or yellow and pendulous, and the

smaller female catkins are yellow or yellowish green, with three to six flowers clustered together.



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**Fruit:** The fruit is an oval to oblong nut, 1 to 2 inches long and .6 to 1.2 inches broad, dark



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brown with a rough husk 3–4 mm thick, which splits off in four sections at maturity to release the thin-shelled nut. Pecans, like the fruit of all other members of the hickory family, are not true nuts but are technically a

drupe (fruit with a single stone or pit).

**Bark:** The bark is smooth when young,

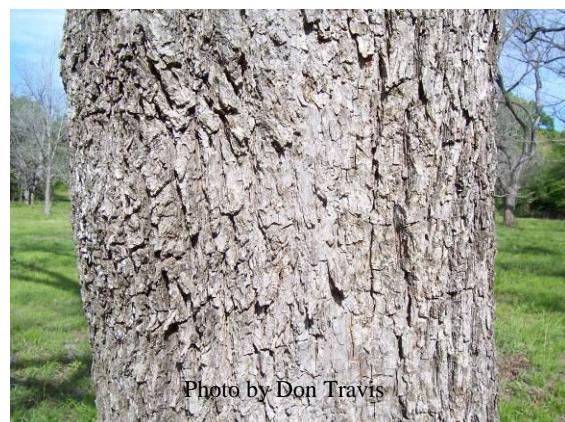


Photo by Don Travis

becoming narrowly fissured into thin broken strips, often scaly.

**Twig:** In early spring, the twigs will break out with buds that are moderately stout, light brown, and fuzzy (particularly when young). Leaf scars are large and three lobed; buds are yellowish brown to brown, hairy, with terminal buds 1/4 to 1/2 inch long. Pecans are one of the last of any trees to form twigs or leaves in the spring.



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