

Species Spotlight: Shagbark Hickory

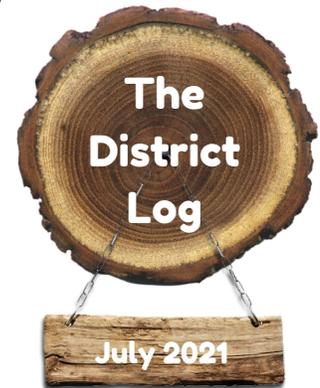
Hickories have their time to shine in mid-summer, where they can provide ample shade during our fun in the sun, and their wood provides an aromatic smoke when used for barbecue. One of the most common hickory species in Southwest Michigan is Shagbark Hickory, scientific name *Carya ovata*. This species grows from the Appalachian mountains to just West of the Mississippi River, and is hardy enough to survive the winters across Michigan's Lower Peninsula. As a close relative of the Pecan, it provides a nut that is delicious and nutritious, enjoyed by wildlife and in human cuisine. Shagbark Hickory provides many benefits to us, but also plays an important role in our forests.

Hickories as a species play a similar role to oaks in the forests, and even have a deep taproot like many oak species. Shagbark Hickory is particularly slow growing, and is most often found scattered throughout oak and pine forests, and rarely grows in pure groves of hickory. For this reason they are often seen in older and more established woods, where they have popped up as openings in the canopy are caused by windstorms, tree disease, or human activity. Another similarity with oak trees is that they produce a nut that is beloved by woodland creatures. Wild Turkey is especially fond of this winter-hardy food, and can often be seen roosting in their branches. Birds aren't the only ones who love to roost in these trees, as bats also rest underneath their namesake shaggy bark. The large plates of flaking bark make for perfect roosting spots for species such as the Indiana Bat.

The benefits we see from these trees are plenty, although most folks are just familiar with their wood. Hickory wood is notably tough, and is often used for handles in a great variety of tools that need to withstand repeated shock, such as hammers, pickaxes, and shovels. The wood is also burned for heat, and is one of the most efficient wood fuels in North America! Our most familiar use of hickory, however, is using their woodchips for smoking flavorful foods and barbecuing meat.

This is not the only culinary use, and is a key difference between them and oaks. Their nuts are edible, and are actually similar to pecans in taste, and can be used to substitute them in recipes. On a commercial scale, they are not reliable enough to produce enough nuts to compete with agricultural pecan trees, but can be a great local forage from your own woods.

Learning about the trees and shrubs in the forest can help you get even more enjoyment out of your land. Every species has a story, and learning about them can make all the difference when planning for the future of your forest. If you want more information like this, or have other questions about trees in general, the Barry Conservation District has a forester on staff who can help you! District Forester Ben Savoie provides forest resources, management planning advice, and referrals to local forestry professionals at no cost to you. You can reach Ben at 269-908-4134, or by email at ben.savoie@macd.org.



This month by the numbers:

Site Visits - 7
Site Visit Acreage - 104
Private Sector Referrals - 6
Public Sector Referrals - 4
Media Occurrences - 5

Outreach Activities:

Interview with 103.5 FM on Gypsy Moth
Multiple Interviews with Ottawa CD newspapers for landowner resources on Gypsy Moth

Open Referrals:

08-21-29:

Roughly 20 acres of lowland hardwoods, some black walnut,, desires management plan for timber harvesting

