

Species Spotlight: Tuliptree

The forests of Michigan are coming into bloom, and there are quite a few vibrant and beautiful trees you may notice. One that deserves a spotlight is the Tuliptree, *Liriodendron tulipifera*. Also known as Yellow Poplar or Tulip Poplar, this flowering tree comes into bloom in early May through June, which makes it easy to spot in Springtime. Tuliptree's tulip-shaped flowers it makes are just one peculiar thing about this tree, this species makes our forests quite special!

Tuliptree is found widely throughout southern Michigan. It's native range goes East to Connecticut and South to the Florida Panhandle. This wide range covers quite the variety of soil types and moisture regimes. In Michigan you can expect to find it where moisture levels are stable and well-drained, much like where you can find most of our oaks and hickories. The roots of this tree go deep and wide, and the trunks grow fast. This means they have a high demand for the resources in the forest, especially light. Because of this need, Tuliptree has adapted to grow straight up as fast as possible, with the record height reaching 192 feet; dwarfing many Michigan forest giants. Also, they tend to have clear trunk that forms a compact clump of branches near the canopy.

Aside from this utility pole-like appearance, the easiest ways to identify this tree is by their distinctive flowers and leaves. In May and June, these flowers have greenish-yellow petals that have a splash of orange color at their base. The height of the trees may make them difficult to see, but on younger trees they are easy to spot. They also give off a light cucumber-like fragrance. Be patient if you have a young one growing in your woods, it can take them up to 15 years to grow from seed to flowering age. The leaves are much more likely to be seen on or around the tree, and appear to be tulip-shaped in profile. In fall, these leaves showcase a vibrant yellow color, making them sought after for ornamental use.

Tuliptree is beautiful both inside and out. It's wood is used in a wide variety of industries. The wood itself is extremely versatile and is used anywhere that stable wood is needed. The wood is used as the structural parts of furniture. It is sometimes covered with the veneer of more high-value wood. The closest comparison for the usefulness of this wood is White Pine; another staple of Michigan's forests. In an earlier time, these trees were regularly used to craft dugout canoes, because it's softness makes it easy to carve, but is strong enough for river travel. The wood is only one use of this tree, however. The nectar-producing flowers are important to the honey industry, with these trees making a unique reddish honey.

While we enjoy the benefits of the Tuliptree, there are many other creatures that make use of this tree throughout their lives. Possibly the most notable example is the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail butterfly, which feeds on the nectar and lays eggs on the leaves of Tuliptrees and other types of Magnolias. Birds of all kinds draw on the Tuliptree for food as well. The Ruby-Throated Hummingbird frequents the spring flowers for their nectar, and the plentiful seeds that are dispersed throughout autumn are eaten by finches, cardinals, and other songbirds. Michigan's game species are no stranger to the tree either. Whitetail Deer often browse any leaves within reach and ground birds such as Turkey and Quail eat the seeds.

Learning about the trees 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:

Private Sector Referrals - 7
Public Sector Referrals - 5
Media Occurrences - 3
Tree Farm Inspections - 5

Open Referrals:

70-20-17:

30 acres of forestland adjacent to township cemetery. Old Pine plantation regrowing to mixed hardwoods, mostly oaks. Seeking management plan to improve timber production, recreation opportunities, and forest health.

During this difficult time, I highly recommend following the CDC guidelines for social distancing and staying home if you can. Please stay healthy and safe!

