

photo courtesy of flickr
user "godpasta"

Flowers in the **Bigoniaceae Family** (*Bigonia Family*)
are typically beautiful



Characteristics of the Northern Catalpa

Deciduous tree, may range from 40 to 70 feet tall.

Bark: is furrowed. This tree grows fast and the wood, though soft and not very heavy (Grimm), is very resistant to decay and rotting (ODNR).

Leaves: Leaves are both large and wide (6-12 inches long, 4-8 inches wide) and are heart shaped, making the tree easy to spot (Grimm).

Stems: The whorled arrangement of leaves makes this tree easy to identify. Also on stems after the leaves have fallen are "leaf scars" that sink down into the twigs of the tree (USDA).

Flowers: Perfect flower structure (USDA), flowers grow in groups and are 5 ways regular. Photo of a flower is displayed above.

Fruit: Dihescent seed pod that splits after drying in the fall, the pods grow anywhere from 10-24 inches long (USDA)



Don't confuse this tree with:

The Southern Catalpa, which looks very similar to *Catalpa speciosa*, but has smaller pods and bark that has redder hues. (Grimm 655)



Multiple Choice:

What is the Hardy Catalpa's wood used for?

- a) fence posts
- b) railroad ties
- c) furniture
- d) all of the above

References

Amoroso, Meghan. "The Showy Northern Catalpa." *American Forests* 111.2 (2005): 44-46. Academic Search Complete. EBSCO. Web. 20 Sept. 2011.

Geyer, Wayne A., and Patrick J. Broyles. *USDA Plant Fact Sheet: Northern Catalpa*. US Department of Agriculture, June 2006. Web. 16 Sept. 2011.
<http://plants.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_casp8.pdf>.f 555

Godpasta, . *Northern Catalpa Flowers*. 2006. Flickr. Web. 16 Sept. 2011.
<<http://www.flickr.com/photos/godpasta/3072260992/in/p>>

Grimm, William C. *The Illustrated Book of Trees*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2002. N. pag. Print.

ODNR. *Northern Catalpa (Catalpa speciosa)*. Ohio Department of Natural Resources, n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2011.
<http://ohiodnr.com/forestry/trees/catalpa_nthrn/tabid/5349/Default.aspx>.

Oehlke, Bill. *Ceratomia catalpae* (Boisduval, 1875): *CATALPA SPHINX*. University of California, Berkeley, 2011. Web. 19 Sept. 2011.
<[http://www.discoverlife.org/mp/20q?act=x_ant&path=Insecta/Lepidoptera/Sphingidae/Ceratomia/catalpae&name=Ceratomia+catalpae&guide=Caterpillars&authority=\(Boisduval,+1875\)&common_name=Catalpa+sphinx](http://www.discoverlife.org/mp/20q?act=x_ant&path=Insecta/Lepidoptera/Sphingidae/Ceratomia/catalpae&name=Ceratomia+catalpae&guide=Caterpillars&authority=(Boisduval,+1875)&common_name=Catalpa+sphinx)>.

Bigoniaceae Family



Northern Catalpa

Catalpa speciosa

"Hardy Catalpa"



Rachel Suzanne Smith

smithrs4

History of the Northern Catalpa

The *Catalpa speciosa* tree, though it grows well in Ohio, is not native to this region. According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Northern Catalpa flourished first in the middle of the Mississippi Valley Basin, and introduced to the Buckeye State approximately 200 Years ago. Before the use of metal fencing, the fast growing, slow rotting (see characteristics) tree was useful for fencing in farms (ODNR). The rate of growth slows as the tree ages, but during the



first few years, a tree could easily grow 10 feet, making it ideal for use and reforestation (Amoroso). Though the *Catalpa speciosa* thrives in deep soil, there are many planted in urban areas that provide shade and aesthetics to the surroundings (USDA). The Northern Catalpa is also found in China (Amoroso).

Geographical Location:

The Northern Catalpa is now found in approximately 17 northern states, and has also made its home in China and the southern part of Canada (Amoroso). The Hardy Catalpa is sometimes used in urban planning, but also finds its place in land recovering from mining. When planting a Catalpa, one must simply ensure that enough space is allocated to allow for rapid growth, both vertical and horizontal (USDA).

Susceptibility to insects, fungi:

Though the *Catalpa speciosa* grows fast and is typically a highly successful tree, there are a few species of fungi and larva to which the tree is highly susceptible. *Macrosporium catalpae* is the fungus responsible for the brown spots found on leaves, such as those on the leaves pictured on this panel (USDA). *Polystictus versicolor* is a fungus that can cause decay in *Catalpa* trees as well. *Cecidomyia catalpae*, or the Catalpa midge, also can do harm to the terminal buds, seed pods, leaves, and outward appendages (USDA).

Insects that enjoy (and do damage to) the *Catalpa speciosa* are most notably the *Catalpa sphynx* caterpillar, which according to the ODNR Division of Forestry is the number one hazard to the otherwise resilient trees. While diseases and fungi, such as those mentioned earlier CAN affect a tree, it is the small caterpillar (which on a riverbank makes good bait for fishermen, according to Amoroso) that can actually "defoliate" a tree (ODNR).



James Adams
discoverlife.org



© John Pickering, 2006-2011

discoverlife.org

Why is the Northern Catalpa Useful?

While the Northern Catalpa is home to the *Catalpa sphynx* caterpillar, it is also a tree that has been widely used by humans as well. The bark can be used to make a tea that is medicinal, and some say that the leaves can provide pain relief when used as a bandage (Amoroso). Traditionally, the wood derived from a Northern Catalpa tree was used for railroad ties and fencing. The soft wood is great for carving decorations for the home and making inexpensive furniture as well (Grimm).



Other names for the *Catalpa speciosa*:

Western Catalpa, Catawba-Tree, Hardy Catalpa, Western Catalpa (ODNR)