

## *American Hornbeam*

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This is a small ornamental tree that offers something for home landscapers during every Minnesota season. It is a member of the birch family (Betulaceae) that has many aliases. Besides the commonly accepted name of American Hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), it is also called the Blue Beech (not the true Beech family, Fagaceae), Musclewood, Water Beech and Ironwood. The source of these common names directly reflects some of the attributes of this species: it has a bluish-gray bark with enlarged, rounded, vertical ridges on the trunk that look like flexed arm muscles; its light brown wood is close-grained and very hard; it is tolerant of occasional flooding. The species name comes from the Latin word for hornbeam.



This plant grows to about 20 feet high and has a 25 feet spread as either a single-stemmed tree or a multi-stemmed shrub. It grows in zone 3b-9 in shade or full sun. It is upright spreading with dense branching and a round to slightly flat-topped crown. It's finely serrated dark green leaves turn to a variety of fall colors – yellow, orange, red and reddish-purple. The variability of the fall colors is due to the environmental conditions. This tree is difficult to transplant and should be purchased as B & B or as container grown in the early spring. It likes a deep, rich, moist, slightly acid soil best, but it can adapt to almost any Minnesota soil conditions including a sunny home landscape.

It is native to Minnesota and is found at the bottom of slopes, along the borders of streams and near swamps. It has been cultivated since the War of 1812. It is commonly seen as an understory tree and can tolerate shade and occasional flooding. It has not major disease or insect problems. There is some suckering, so mow around the base if you don't heavily mulch beneath the drip line.

This is a small tree that can, and should, be used more in home landscapes. It makes a good companion to other small ornamental trees such as Redbud, Pagoda Dogwood and Serviceberry.