



LIQUIDAMBAR STYRACIFLUA

Fam. Hamamelidaceae

DESCRIPTION

It can grow up to 25-35 m and above; its crown is pyramidal or rounded, depending on age, and has a diameter of 10 m; in fact, this tree has an erect and conical habit in young specimens that tends to expand over the years. It is very coarse and withstands winter frosts.

LEAVES

Long, dark-green, petiolate leaves with jagged margins and a palmate shape with 5-7 lobes. The colours of the leaves in autumn turn from yellow to orange, red and crimson, making this plant spectacular.

FRUITS

The witch-hazel produces orbicular infructescences up to 4 cm large which contain several dozen pods. Each pod contains 1 or 2 seeds. The thorny infructescence is initially green and it becomes woody over time.

HABITAT

Tree native to North America, especially, the South-Eastern regions.

DISTRIBUTION

Widespread throughout Italy, both as a roadside tree and in the avenues of large parks or, isolated, in small gardens.

FLOWERS

Unisexual flowers, bundled in separate male and female inflorescences. This plant is monoecious and blooms in May.

BARK

The bark is grey-brown and deeply furrowed; on the branches and twigs, it is arranged in plates and resembles the skin of an alligator.

INTERESTING FACTS

This species is known for its balsamic properties and is widely used in phytotherapy. The bark exudes a valuable oleoresin (improperly referred to as "Storax", as it resembles that produced by plants of the Styracaceae family), a viscous liquid similar to honey though greenish, with a scent reminiscent of cinnamon and vanilla, with an acrid note. After being properly treated, this resin – also known as "Benzoin" or "Liquidambar" – was used as a drug. In the perfume industry, Storax is used as a fixative for volatile perfumes.

ROOTS

Extended root system that goes very deep; it can develop large taproots from the base of the stem.

