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# SUNNYSIDE THYMES

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## SMG's Grow Native!

By Margie Conard, SMG Member

### **Eastern Hophornbeam, (*Ostrya Virginiana*)**

Since the recent loss of two evergreen trees, loved and counted on for the privacy they gave me in my back yard, I have had plenty of time to imagine what tree I could put in their place to repair and enhance that vacant area.

The hop hornbeam is the tree I have chosen. It is a native deciduous tree, ranging from Nova Scotia to eastern Wyoming, southwest to Texas and southeast to Florida. Scattered throughout Indiana and Kentucky, but not abundant, it is an understory tree that grows from 20' to 40', usually occurring in dry limestone woods. It prefers light shade, is rather slow growing, and generally has a graceful rounded crown, compact shape and red-orange or yellow fall foliage.

The name comes from the seed which resembles hops used in beer production and the hard wood which was often used for the yoke of oxen, and other artisan tools. Male flowers are visible in winter, enlarging in spring to 4"-6" in length as the flowers open. Male and female flowers are on the same tree, the female flowers opening in slim cylindrical catkins less than an inch long. As the wood is so hard, (more so than oak, ash or hickory, only dogwood is harder) it is very resistant to disease and insects. The birds and other wildlife love the seeds, small 1/4" ovoid flat nutlets encased in papery inflated husks.

The reddish-brown bark of the hop hornbeam is interesting, rough and covered with loose rectangular flaky scales. The leaves are simple and alternate, with toothed margins, 2"-6" long and feel like felt.

Although this tree prefers light shade, it will tolerate full sun as long as it gets enough water. It requires good drainage, and cannot tolerate standing water. With its slow growth it can take thirty years to reach its mature height, and has a long tap root, giving it good wind resistance and soil holding capacity.

Such a tree, needing little special care, with all these fine attributes, visual interest in every sea-

son, should be much sought after! But I searched in vain in the Louisville area for a specimen for my back yard. I was forced to go on line and out of state and then waited three months for my prize possession! Now planted in the perfect location, I check it daily for the first sign of a living leaf to emerge. The nursery assures me that it was taken and shipped while still dormant and “trees in this condition take longer to leaf out. The roots have to establish themselves before the tree will show new growth.”

And so I wait....maybe tomorrow!

#### *Resources:*

- “North American Trees” by Richard J Preston, Jr.
- “Peterson Field Guide” by George A. Petrides
- “Field Guide to Trees of North America” by Kershner, Mathews, Nelson and Spellenberg
- “Trees and Shrubs of Kentucky” by Mary Wharton and Roger Barbour



*Bark, male catkins, female catkins. All photos Univ. of Ky.*

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