

# Balsam Poplar

*Populus balsamifera*



*Balsam  
Poplar*

*Cottonwood  
(for comparison)*

Forage Value

G	F	P
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Bank/Shoreline Protection

E	G	F	P
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Plant Status

**Native**

## Identification Tips

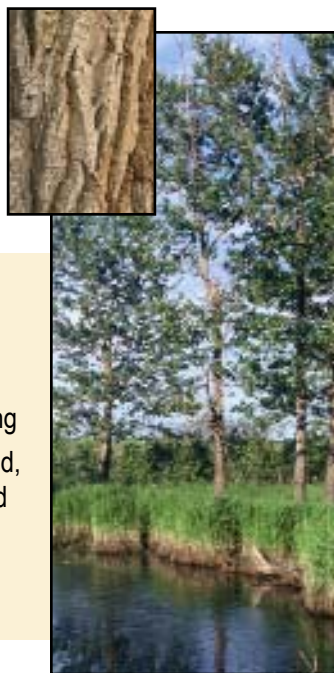
- ◆ bark is light grey and smooth on young trees, dark grey and furrowed on mature trees
- ◆ winter buds are large, sticky and sweet-smelling
- ◆ leaves alternate, round bases, tip sharp-pointed, dark glossy green above, paler below, size and shape varies; leaf stem is round
- ◆ large amounts of cottony seeds are released from drooping catkins in late spring

## Similar Species

**Plains cottonwood** (*Populus deltoides*) is also a type of poplar tree, but it has triangular-shaped leaves. Cottonwoods are not as common as balsam poplar, but they are a very important part of southern Alberta river valleys.

**Riparian Remark** *Balsam poplars and cottonwoods live for 100 years or less.*

*Regeneration by suckering and seeds is vital, but can be hampered by intensive livestock grazing and extensive water withdrawals or damming. When you look at a poplar forest, can you see the next generation? Check for seedlings and saplings to gauge the health of poplar and cottonwood communities.*



## Riparian Function & Values

- ◆ Deep binding root systems protect banks and shorelines against erosion.
- ◆ Poplars protect riparian plant communities from damage during spring ice breakup.
- ◆ Poplar trees provide summer shade and winter shelter for livestock and wildlife.
- ◆ Poplar-dominated communities provide critical habitat for birds, especially during the breeding season.
- ◆ Balsam poplar is a pioneer species that rapidly colonizes areas of newly deposited sediment.