Gordonia lasianthus
Loblolly-Bay

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INTRODUCTION

A native American, usually single-trunked, evergreen tree, Loblolly-Bay reaches a height of 35 to 60 feet with a columnar or pyramidal, very open growth habit (Fig. 1). The two to seven-inch-long, glossy, dark green leaves are a light grey color on the underside, giving a two-toned effect in the wind. Although evergreen, several individual leaves at a time will turn a brilliant scarlet color in the fall adding to its attractiveness. The white, two to three-inch-wide, five-petalled, cup-shaped flowers open from late spring through summer and are very attractive but sparsely produced throughout the canopy.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Gordonia lasianthus*

Pronunciation: gor-DOE-nee-uh lay-zee-ANTH-us

Common name(s): Loblolly-Bay, Sweet-Bay

Family: *Theaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7 through 9 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: espalier; reclamation plant; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION

Height: 35 to 60 feet

Spread: 10 to 15 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: columnar

Crown density: open

Growth rate: medium

Texture: medium

Figure 1. Middle-aged Loblolly-Bay.
Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrulate
Leaf shape: oblong; oblanceolate
Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate; reticulate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: red
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristics: spring flowering; summer flowering; very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown; green
Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in the shade; tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; acidic; extended flooding
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: none

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
Other

**Roots**: surface roots are usually not a problem  
**Winter interest**: no special winter interest  
**Outstanding tree**: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more  
**Invasive potential**: little, if any, potential at this time  
**Pest resistance**: no pests are normally seen on the tree

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

Loblolly-Bay makes an attractive specimen planting and its light, airy growth habit lends itself well to smaller, partially enclosed locations. In moist soils, Loblolly-Bay naturalizes well and is well-suited to the low-maintenance landscape. Due to the shape of the crown, it makes a suitable tree in urban areas with restricted, narrow overhead space, and should do well as a street tree, although it has not been extensively used yet.

Preferring partial shade and moist soil, Loblolly-Bay can tolerate full sun only with sufficient moisture. Loblolly-Bay has a shallow root system and will die if not watered during periods of drought. It is found in the wild most often growing in wet sites in the shade of maples, cypress and pines. It is well-suited for planting in boggy and other poorly drained soils. It is not salt-tolerant. Not for dry climates.

Propagation is by seeds which germinate well after stratification, or by cuttings.

The cultivar ‘Variegata’ has white and green foliage, white flowers.

**Pests**

Pest problems are borers in weakened trees, aphids, and caterpillars.

**Diseases**

No diseases are of major concern.