Halesia carolina
Carolina Silverbell

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INTRODUCTION

A North American native tree, Carolina Silverbell grows into a 20 to 40-foot-tall tree with a 15 to 30-foot-spread and a pyramidal silhouette (Fig. 1). Some horticulturists do not separate this from Halesia monticola. The two to four-inch-long leaves turn yellow in fall and are among the first to drop in autumn. The tree prefers sandy loam and begins blooming when only 10 to 12 feet tall. The white, bell-shaped, showy blossoms are borne in two to five-inch-long clusters. Flowering occurs along last year’s branches in mid-May. Because the flowers point downward, they are partially hidden by the foliage and best viewed from below. Other ornamental features are the yellow fall color and the bark, which peels off in large, flat scales. The pale yellow fruits are quite attractive as they hang down from last year’s branches. Carolina Silverbell may transplant poorly in the fall.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Halesia carolina
Pronunciation: hal-EE-zhee-uh kair-oh-LYE-nuh
Common name(s): Carolina Silverbell
Family: Styracaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 5 through 8 (Fig. 2)
Origin: native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); near a deck or patio; narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

DESCRIPTION

Height: 40 to 60 feet
Spread: 15 to 30 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: round; upright; vase shape

Figure 1. Middle-aged Carolina Silverbell.
**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** medium

**Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** serrulate

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval); oblong; ovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** yellow

**Fall characteristic:** showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** spring flowering; very showy

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** oval

**Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** green; yellow

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; showy trunk; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown

**Current year twig thickness:** thin
**Culture**

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; occasionally wet; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** low

**Other**

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

**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**

This tree is interesting all year long, with attractive medium green foliage, pretty flowers, showy fruits, and exfoliating bark. It branches low to the ground, making a nice lawn or specimen tree and when pruned to one central leader can be used as a street tree in residential areas. The bark shows off nicely with foliage removed from the lower branches, and multistemmed specimens come-to-life when lit from below at nighttime. It is a splendid small tree to locate near a patio or deck.

An understory tree best suited for a partially shaded or shaded location, Silverbell prefers moist, fertile soil with an accumulation of leaf litter and/or mulch. Water the tree during a drought and avoid compacted soil.

Propagation is by seeds sown as soon as ripe or stratified, and by layering, root cuttings, and greenwood cuttings. Small trees and seedlings transplant easily.

One cultivar is listed: ‘Rosea’, with pale pink flowers.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.