Halesia diptera
Two-Winged Silverbell

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

Two-Winged Silverbell is a wonderful, small, deciduous native tree, reaching 20 to 30 feet in height, with a fairly dense, rounded silhouette when grown in the full sun (Fig. 1). In its native habitat as an understory tree along stream banks it appears more open. Branches grow from the base of the tree forming a multi-trunked tree suited for specimen or patio planting. Although native to the deep south, it is, unfortunately, known little and not grown by many nurseries. In springtime, the trees produce a multitude of beautiful, showy, bell-shaped white flowers which are followed by two-winged, 1.5 to 2-inch-long drupes.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Halesia diptera
Pronunciation: hal-EE-zhee-uh DIP-ter-uh
Common name(s): Two-Winged Silverbell, Snowdrop Tree
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; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); no proven urban tolerance
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

DESCRIPTION

Height: 20 to 30 feet
Spread: 20 to 30 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: round; vase shape
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: medium
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); obovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

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Halesia diptera -- Two-Winged Silverbell

**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** no fall color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not 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:** yellow  
**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; no significant litter problem; showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; 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; not particularly showy; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns  
**Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop 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 the shade; tree grows in full sun  
**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; occasionally wet; well-drained  
**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**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

*Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.*
USE AND MANAGEMENT

Two-Winged Silverbell is slowly gaining in popularity for landscape use, and is ideal for naturalizing in locations with moist soil. It is not drought-tolerant and should always be located in a protected spot sheltered from full day sun and wind. Grows best with mulch beneath the entire canopy. It makes a nice addition to the shaded shrub border with its spring flower display and creates an excellent understory tree beneath large natives. Use it as you would Flowering Dogwood. Also used as a patio tree for creating shade in a small, residential landscape. Not a tree for planting in the open or along a street.

Two-Winged Silverbell should be located in partial shade on very well-drained acid soil where leaf litter and mulch are allowed to accumulate. It grows in full sun in the north, adapts to almost total shade. It is not adapted to clay.

Variety maginflorea has larger flowers and is a vigorous grower in the South.

Propagation is by seed.

PESTS AND DISEASES

No pests or diseases are of major concern. It is amazingly pest free.