White Poplar is a fast-growing, deciduous tree which reaches 60 to 100 feet in height with a 40 to 50-foot-spread and makes a nice shade tree, although it is considered short-lived (Fig. 1). This cultivar maintains a more pyramidal or columnar form throughout its life. Some refer to this plant as Bolleana Poplar. It has the shape of a Lombardy Poplar but grows slightly wider. The dark green, lobed leaves have a fuzzy, white underside which gives the tree a sparkling effect when the breezes stir the leaves. These leaves are totally covered with this white fuzz when they are young and first open. The fall color is pale yellow. The flowers appear before the leaves in spring but are not showy and they are followed by tiny, fuzzy seedpods which contain numerous seeds. It is the white trunk and bark of White Poplar which is particularly striking, along with the beautiful two-toned leaves. The bark stays smooth and white until very old when it can become ridged and furrowed. The wood of White Poplar is fairly brittle and subject to breakage in storms and the soft bark is subject to injury from vandals. Leaves often drop from the tree beginning in summer and continue dropping through the fall.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Populus alba ‘Pyramidalis’
Pronunciation: POP-yoo-lus AL-buh
Common name(s): ‘Pyramidalis’ White Poplar
Family: Salicaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 3 through 8 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America

Uses: reclamation plant; screen; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

Figure 1. Young ‘Pyramidalis’ White Poplar.
DESCRIPTION

Height: 60 to 100 feet
Spread: 40 to 50 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: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: lobed; sinuate; undulate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); star-shaped
Leaf venation: palmate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: yellow
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow
Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: white
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure
Breakage: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
Pests

No pests are of major concern, but occasionally leaf-hoppers bother it.

Diseases

Crown gall occasionally infects the tree.

Current year twig color: gray
Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
Drought tolerance: high
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere with mowing
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: No entries found.
Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

USE AND MANAGEMENT

White Poplar should be grown in full sun and tolerates almost any soil, wet or dry. Suckering may be a problem on stressed trees but those growing vigorously are usually not bothered. In areas with much air pollution and soot, the fuzzy white undersides of the leaves may attract and hold dirt and dust making them unattractive.

This cultivar is also referred to as the ‘Bolleana’.