**Populus nigra** ‘Italica’
Lombardy Poplar

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

**INTRODUCTION**

Often planted for its fast growth and usefulness as a short-lived screen or windbreak, Lombardy Poplar forms a slender column of many short, upward-pointing branches and can reach 40 to 60 feet in height with a spread of only 10 to 12 feet (Fig. 1). But canker disease almost always infects the tree by the time the tree is 10 to 15 years old so trees are rarely seen larger than about 30 feet tall by five feet wide. The triangular to diamond-shaped, 2 to 3.5-inch-long by 1.5 to 3-inch-wide deciduous leaves are bright green on both sides throughout the year, turning a blazing golden yellow in fall before dropping. The small, inconspicuous flowers appear in spring. The bark is grey/green on young trees and new growth, but becomes black, thickened, and furrowed on older, larger trunks.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scientific name:** *Populus nigra* ‘Italica’
**Pronunciation:** POP-yoo-lus NYE-gruh
**Common name(s):** Lombardy Poplar
**Family:** Salicaceae
**USDA hardness zones:** 3 through 9A (Fig. 2)
**Origin:** not native to North America
**Uses:** reclamation plant; no proven urban tolerance
**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

**DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 40 to 50 feet
**Spread:** 10 to 12 feet

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1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-501, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.
2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.
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: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: crenate; serrate
Leaf shape: deltoid; ovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: yellow
Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

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

Fruit

There is no fruit on this tree.

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: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break
Current year twig color: brown
Current year twig thickness: thin
**Pests**

No pests are of major concern.

**Diseases**

Stem canker disease is so devastating that this tree is usually not included on any recommended tree lists, with the exception of a reclamation site. Choose from the many other available columnar or upright screening trees for a more durable planting.

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

If planted, Lombardy Poplar should be grown in full sun on well-drained, acid or alkaline soil. It tolerates wet soil well but also performs in drought, losing leaves early in very dry summers. Multiple suckers often appear at the base of trees and occasionally on roots far from the tree, and the roots are considered invasive. Also, the trees are, unfortunately, very susceptible to stem canker disease which usually limits their life to only 10 or 15-years. Plant other narrow-crowned trees including ‘Fastigiate’ European Hornbeam, Armstrong Maple, ‘Fastigiata’ Alder, Fastigiate English Oak, Leyland Cypress, and others instead of this tree.

Propagation is by cuttings since Lombardy Poplar is a male clone.