

witch hazel *Hamamelis virginiana*

Kingdom: Plantae

Phylum: Magnoliophyta

Class: Magnoliopsida

Order: Hamameilidales

Family: Hamamelidaceae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

Witch hazel is a small tree or shrub that grows up to 25 feet tall with a maximum trunk diameter of 10 inches. Its crown is broadly rounded, and its bark is light brown, dividing into scales as it ages. The leaves are alternate and simple with a round or ovate shape and rounded teeth around the margin. Each leaf may be up to six inches long and three inches wide. The two sides of the leaves do not meet evenly at the leaf base. Small hairs are usually present on the leaves and leafstalks. Leaves turn yellow in fall. The flowers have four narrow, yellow petals and four, triangular, yellow sepals and appear in clusters. Flowers are up to two-thirds inch in length. The fruit is a brown, hairy capsule, up to one-half inch long containing several seeds. The capsules take a year to mature, usually opening in the fall as the flowers are in bloom. The wood is light brown, hard and heavy.

BEHAVIORS

Witch hazel grows in woods, savannas, woodland edges and dunes near Lake Michigan. It can be found in the northern one-half of Illinois plus Richland, St. Clair, Wabash and White counties, although it is not common anywhere in the state. It is the last woody plant to bloom in Illinois in the fall, and it usually does so after its leaves fall from the stems. This tree is often planted as an ornamental in landscaping. The astringent witch hazel is derived from the plant. The flowers provide nectar for pollinators. The plant parts are eaten by a variety of insects and insect larvae. Seeds provide food for wildlife.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

shrub prairie

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