

BLACK ASH

Fraxinus nigra Marsh.
plant symbol = FRNI

Contributed by: USDA NRCS New York State Office



Robert H. Mohlenbrock
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Alternate Names

brown ash, swamp ash, basket ash

Uses

Cultural: The primary use of black ash is as a source of basket-making materials, particularly for Native Americans.

Timber: It has some use as flooring, as which it performs admirably.

Wildlife: Young trees are preferred as deer browse.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Fraxinus nigra Marsh., black ash, is a native, deciduous tree which has important cultural significance to Native Americans. Alternative common names are descriptive of the preferred

habitat and the primary use of the species. Black ash is a small to medium sized tree with opposite branching and compound leaves. Leaflets number 7-11 (typically more than green ash) and are green and smooth on both sides. The terminal leaflet has a short stalk, but the other leaflets are attached directly to the leaf stalk (petiole). The fruit is a samara with a broader wing than that of green ash. The bark is pale gray and flaky, and the crushed foliage smells like elderberry. The first key to identifying black ash is its location on poorly drained sites. It is slower growing (1.5-2.5 ft/yr) than associated trees such as red maple.

Adaptation and Distribution

Black ash grows on sites and soils with generally poor drainage, including peat, fine sands, and loams in bogs, streambanks and other low spots. It can tolerate a wide range of soil pH. The range of the species extends from the Mason-Dixon Line north to western Ontario and east to the Maritimes. Black ash is shade intolerant and requires some soil disturbance to invade a site naturally.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

The seed of black ash seems to have both seed coat dormancy and chemical dormancy, with immature embryos thrown in for goods measure. Thus getting the seed to germinate in the nursery can be a challenge. Apparently planting the seed very soon after harvest is key to germination. Otherwise a series of natural or artificial cold and warm stratifications will likely be necessary to achieve germination.

Direct planting of seeds is likely to be sparsely successful.

Seedlings must be planted in appropriate soil and site conditions. The species often grows as an understory tree or partly suppressed by other species.

Management

Little is known about managing young stands of black ash. Keeping competing vegetation from totally shading the ash, and protection from heavy deer concentrations are likely strategies. Livestock of all classes must be excluded from the site.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

While none currently exist, the interest in the species will result in the culture of known source materials.

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS <<http://plants.usda.gov>> and Plant Materials Program Web sites <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>.

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