Sullivan's Island

Native Tree Guide

From Marsh to Beach:
Understanding Sullivan's Island's Native Trees for Mitigation and Protection

A History of Sullivan's Island Tree Protection

Sullivan's Island stands out from Charleston County's other barrier islands due to its rare east-to-west orientation. This distinctive alignment promotes the steady accumulation of sand, resulting in the island's ongoing seaward expansion. Over time, these deposits have formed prominent dune ridges and significant elevation changes. The resilient vegetation along these dunes has evolved to thrive in challenging conditions—poor soils, salt spray, and sporadic flooding—leading to land stabilization and the gradual succession of pioneering plant species. As the dunes matured, they fostered the development of the lush maritime forest that defines the island today. Expansive stands of native grasses, shrubs, and trees interweave across this dynamic ecosystem, extending well into the island's interior and supporting a rich array of wildlife by creating a web of diverse ecological niches.[1]

The Island's first tree preservation ordinance was created in the early 1990s following the catastrophic loss of trees during Hurricane Hugo in September 1989. Its purpose was to preserve the natural landscape by enhancing tree mass and canopy throughout the island. The tree preservation ordinance is codified in the Town's Zoning Ordinance and is regulated by the Tree Commission and Town staff.[1]

In addition to protecting their natural beauty, the ordinance protects trees to improve surface drainage and water quality, to prevent erosion and wind damage, and to minimize flooding. Trees also serve to improve air quality, lessen air pollution, protect wildlife, and help to sustain property values.[1]

In 2017, Sullivan's Island was designated a Tree City USA by the Arbor Day Foundation. The Town takes great pride in this status and continues to meet the four established standards: (1) to maintain a Tree Commission with a Certified Arborist on staff (2) to administer and enforce a Tree Protection Ordinance (3) to spend and document a minimum of $2 per person (based on Town population) on a community forestry program and (4) to host an annual Arbor Day observance and issue an annual community proclamation signed by Town Council.

[1]Text from Sullivan's Island Comprehensive Plan 2018–2028, Chapter 9: Natural Resource Element.

Tree Protection, Removal, and Replacement Overview

Tree Protection and Removal:

Any tree with a diameter of 6" or greater, measured as Diameter Breast Height (DBH) or at 4.5' above grade, is protected on Sullivan's Island under one of three categories:

- Category I trees – any tree 16" or greater DBH
- Category II trees – any tree 6"-15" DBH
- All Sabal palmettos are protected as Category II trees, regardless of size, with stipulations for replacement as outlined below

To remove a Category I tree, you must obtain approval from the Tree Commission. Submit your request through the Town's online permitting platform, BS&A, at bsaonline.com by selecting "Apply for a Planning, Zoning, or Engineering Process" under the Services Menu. To remove a Category II tree, select "Apply for a Permit" under the same Services Menu

For all protected trees proposed for preservation, Tree Protection Zones (TPZs) must be established within the limits of disturbance of any permitted construction project. For each tree, the TPZ radius shall be a minimum of 1-foot per inch of tree DBH. This dimension may be altered if the TPZ is developed and actively managed by a certified arborist through construction completion.

Replacement for Healthy Trees:

Removal of all healthy protected trees requires a mitigation plan demonstrating proposed tree replacement. Mitigation plans must use a current survey as a base and indicate the locations and species of all trees proposed for removal and their proposed replacement trees. The plan must also include a table indicating the species, size, and quantity of all proposed replacement trees. For Category I Trees proposed for removal, the mitigation plan must be approved by the Tree Commission. A one-inch for one-inch replacement ratio is required for all healthy trees proposed for removal. Replacement trees must be a minimum of 2" caliper and 10' high.

Information courtesy of Town of Sullivan's Island Tree Maintenance & Removal Guide

Tree Protection, Removal, and Replacement Overview

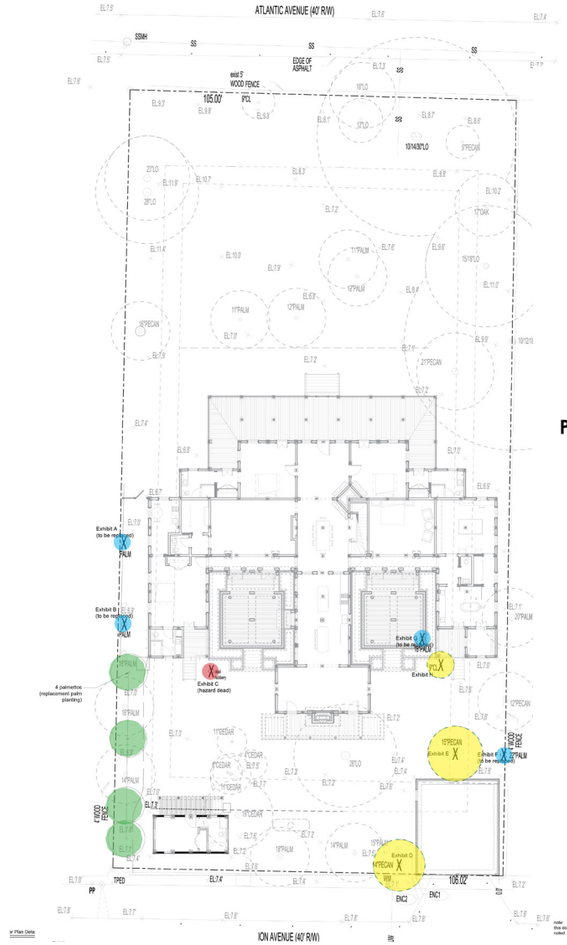
Replacement for Healthy Trees (continued):
This guide should be used to select replacement tree species. Proposed removal of “keystone trees”, including oaks, magnolias, red cedars, and pecans, requires replacement by the same species or a combination of other species on the keystone trees list, indicated in this guide by the stamp above.

The removal of Sabal palmettos requires one-for-one replacement by Sabal palmettos only. For other removed trees, Sabal palmettos may be used as replacement trees; however, they may only account for 1/3 of the total required mitigation inches, and each palmetto may not count as more than 4 inches of mitigation.

Mitigation may also be paid to the Tree Fund at a fair market rate set by the Tree Commission for all species except Sabal palmettos. No mitigation payments can replace replanting palmettos on-site. At the time of publication, the current rate is $230 per inch for hardwoods and $76 per inch for pine species.

Removal of Hazard Trees:
Proposed removal of hazard trees must be accompanied by a written recommendation from a Certified Arborist (ISA, ASCA, or equivalent). This assessment must clearly establish the tree as a hazard or imminent threat to life and safety. Trees meeting this criterion may be removed without mitigation or permitting fees. Non-native invasive species, such as crape myrtles, popcorn trees, and white mulberries, are considered hazard trees regardless of their condition.

Example Mitigation Plan



Tree removal Chart

Tree species	Mitigation
15" pecan	15 x 230 = 3450
14" pecan	14 x 230 = 3220
9" cherry laurel	9 x 230 = 2070
9" hackberry (dead)	no mitigation provided
	Total = $8740
1 palmetto	mitigation provided on landscape plan
1 palmetto	mitigation provided on landscape plan
1 palmetto	mitigation provided on landscape plan
1 palmetto	mitigation provided on landscape plan

Plant Schedule - Proposed Tree Mitigation

Quantity	Botanical Name	Com. Name	Size	Root	Remarks
4	Sabal Palmetto	Palmetto	12-13' O.H.	BR	rej. head, (side prop. line)

Proposed Palmetto Replacement

Proposed Tree Removal

Hazard Tree Removal

Proposed Palmetto Removal

Understanding Your Microclimate

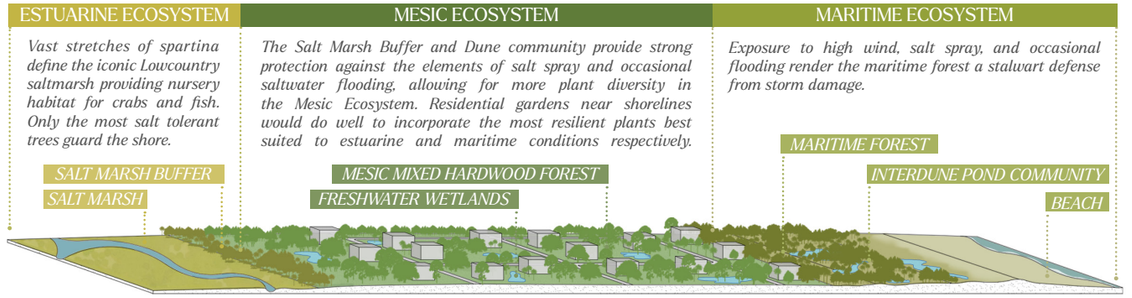
ESTUARINE ECOSYSTEM

MESIC ECOSYSTEM

MARITIME ECOSYSTEM

FRESH WATER WETLAND

Within this guide, tree species are organized by their suitability for each of Sullivan's Islands three primary ecosystems—Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime—so that residents can easily identify the species most likely to thrive within their unique properties. A blue water drop indicates tolerance of wet soil conditions. Bookmarks in the top corner of each page correlate to these ecosystems for quick reference. The transect on the following page provides more information on how these ecosystems are defined.



This axonometric transect depicts Sullivan's Island from the Intracoastal Waterway and marshes to the Atlantic shoreline, organizing the landscape into three ecological zones: Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime. Species distribution across these zones is governed by salt-spray exposure, wind, tidal flooding, soil conditions, and light. The native tree list below uses color blocks to indicate where each species is ecologically appropriate within this island gradient. A blue water drop indicates tolerance of wet soil conditions .

- Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*)
- Devil's Walkingstick (*Aralia spinosa*)
- Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*)
- Pecan (*Carya illinoinensis*)
- Shagbark Hickory (*Carya ovata*)
- Southern Catalpa (*Catalpa bignonioides*)
- Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)
- Fringetree (*Chionanthus virginicus*)
- Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)
- American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*)
- Loblolly Bay (*Gordonia lasianthus*)
- Dahoon Holly (*Ilex cassine*)
- American Holly (*Ilex opaca*)
- Yaupon Holly (*Ilex vomitoria*)
- Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)
- Southern Red Cedar (*J. virginiana var. silicicola*)
- Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*)
- Sweetbay Magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*)
- Blackgum (*Nyssa sylvatica*)
- Bull Pine (*Pinus elliottii*)
- Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*)
- Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*)
- American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)
- Southern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*)
- Carolina Laurel Cherry (*Prunus caroliniana*)
- Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)
- White Oak (*Quercus alba*)
- Scarlet Oak (*Quercus coccinea*)
- Southern Red Oak (*Quercus falcata*)
- Laurel Oak (*Quercus laurifolia*)
- Overcup Oak (*Quercus lyrata*)
- Swamp Chestnut Oak (*Quercus michauxii*)
- Willow Oak (*Quercus phellos*)
- Shumard Oak (*Quercus shumardii*)
- Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*)
- Palmetto (*Sabal palmetto*)
- Carolina Willow (*Salix caroliniana*)
- Black Willow (*Salix nigra*)
- Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)
- Tough Bully (*Sideroxylon tenax*)
- Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*)
- Hercules' Club (*Zanthoxylum clava-herculis*)

Tree Index

Tree Index

Plant images courtesy of contributing photographers on iNaturalist (www.inaturalist.org), used under applicable Creative Commons licenses.

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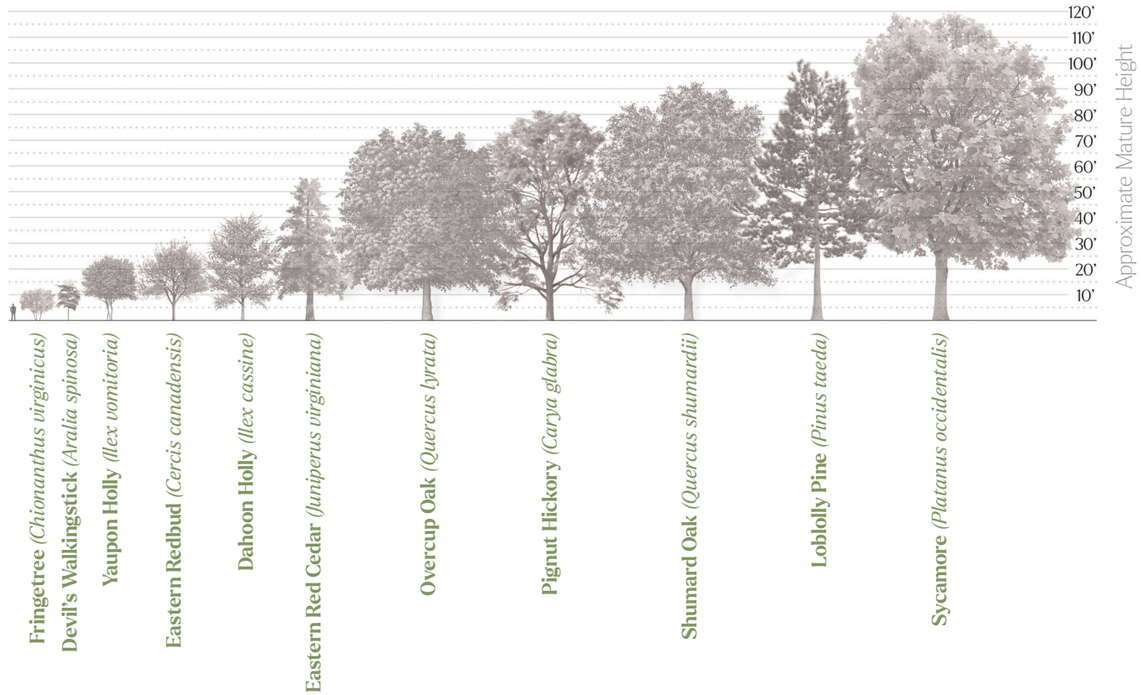
Tree Size Guide

Use this chart to quickly compare stature and understand how different trees relate in overall scale.



Species were selected from this book to illustrate the range of mature heights of approved replacement trees. A 6' human is included on the left as a scale reference.

How To Use This Guide

Understanding Water Needs:

- Low water needs/drought tolerant (once established)
- Moderate water needs (regular watering needed once established)
- High water needs (consistently moist to wet soils; good for naturally wet areas)

Understanding Light Needs:

- Full Sun (6 or more hours of direct sun per day)
- Part Sun/Part Shade (4–6 hours of direct sun per day)
- Full Shade (less than 4 hours of direct sun per day)

Understanding Keystone Trees:

Proposed removal of “keystone trees” including oaks, magnolias, red cedars, and pecans requires replacement by the same species or a combination of other species on the keystone trees list, indicated in this guide by this stamp.

Bird and Pollinator Value:

- Attracts Butterflies
- Attracts Moths
- Attracts Hummingbirds
- Attracts Bees
- Attracts Birds

Resiliency Factors:

Carbon Storage

low med high

Trees absorb carbon dioxide from the air and convert the carbon into biomass (wood, roots, leaves), effectively storing it for as long as the tree lives.

Flood Mitigation

low med high

Trees reduce flooding by capturing rainfall, absorbing and storing water in their roots and trunk, and in sandy soils, drawing water from farther away to spread out excess moisture.

Air Filtration

low med high

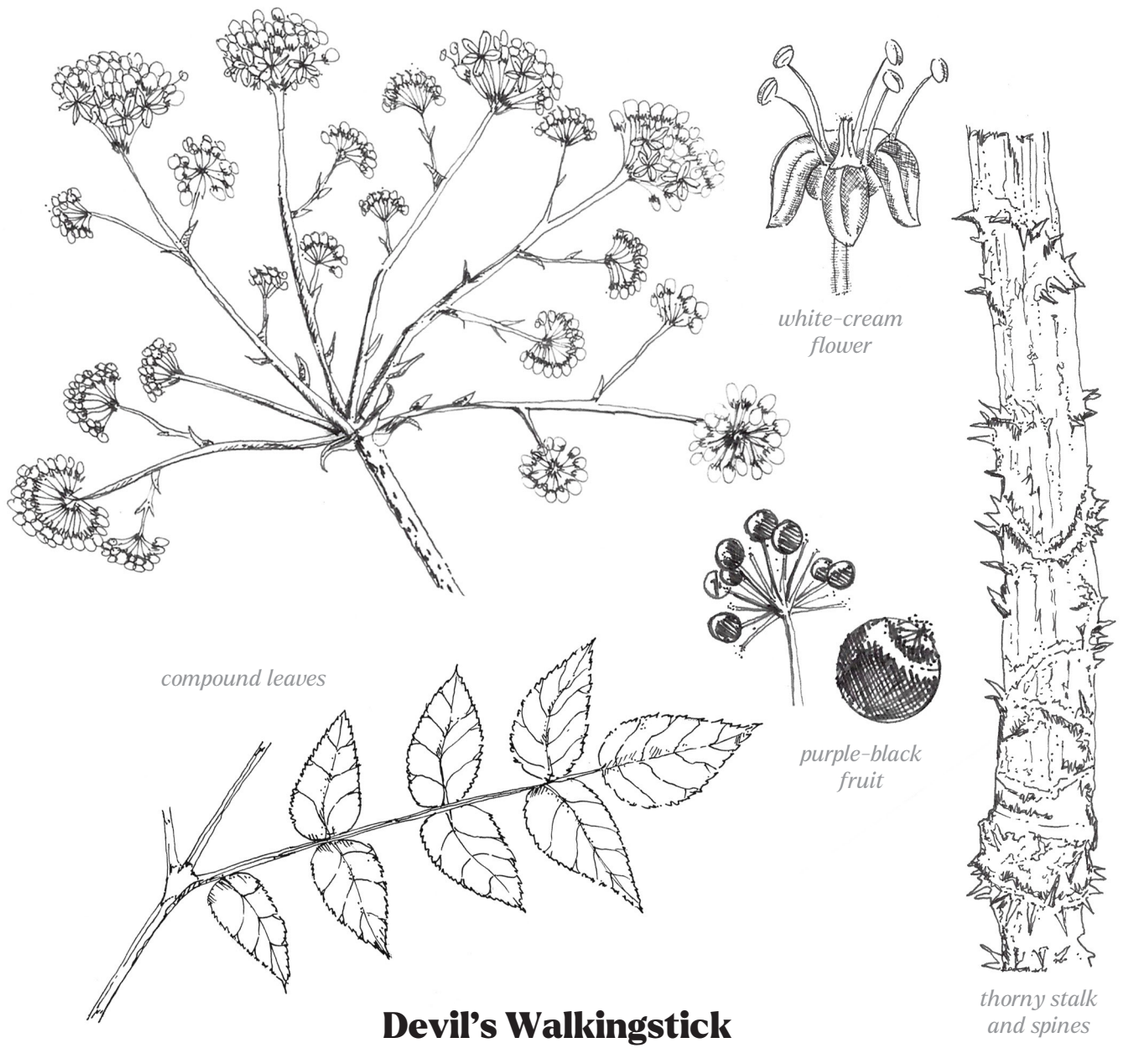
Trees clean the air by trapping particles on their leaves and bark and absorbing harmful gases through their leaves.

Resiliency Factors Data courtesy of US Forest Service’s iTree Assessment tools.

ESTUARINE ECOSYSTEM

MESIC ECOSYSTEM

MARITIME ECOSYSTEM



Devil's Walkingstick
Aralia spinosa

Devil's Walkingstick

Aralia spinosa

This deciduous native reaches 10–35 feet tall and sends up stout, spiny canes topped with very interesting large compound leaves. In late summer, it erupts with beautiful white flower panicles that buzz with pollinators, followed by black, inky berries relished by birds and mammals. Devil's Walkingstick prefers sun to part shade and moist, well-drained soil. It spreads rapidly by self-seeding and is best suited for more natural areas. Foliage softens to golden tones before the canes stand bare for winter.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:
low med high

Flood Mitigation:
low med high

Air Filtration:
low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

American Beech
Red Buckeye
Strawberry Bush

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
Low Drought
No Salt

Tough Bully
Sideroxylon tenax

Tough Bully

Sideroxylon tenax

A rugged, coastal native, Tough Bully grows 8–20 feet tall with dense, twiggy branching that naturally forms a thicket. Its small, leathery leaves and thorn-tipped stems are built for survival, giving it excellent drought tolerance, strong wind resistance, and notably high salt tolerance. In late summer, it produces clusters of small, pale flowers that quietly attract pollinators, followed by dark, berry-like fruits relished by birds and deer. Stems will produce a milky sap when broken.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Longleaf Pine
Sabal Minor
Dune Sunflower

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
High Drought
High Salt

Yaupon Holly

Ilex vomitoria

A coastal broadleaf evergreen, yaupon forms a dense hedge or small tree reaching 10–20 feet tall, with fine-textured foliage that can be easily shaped. It thrives in full sun to part shade and well-drained soils, showing notable salt and wind tolerance. In spring, small greenish-white flowers attract pollinators. Showy red berries make winter food for songbirds and small mammals and create a bright splash of color in the landscape. It's best sited within duneside screens, streetside plantings, or tough coastal edges.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Live Oak
Eastern Red Cedar
Yucca

TOLERANCES:

No Flood
High Drought
Medium Salt

Carolina Willow

Salix caroliniana

A deciduous, fast-growing wetland native, Carolina Willow rises 10–30 feet tall in a loose, irregular form. It prefers full sun and wet to seasonally flooded soils, tolerating prolonged inundation and even soft, mucky ground. It is perfect for marsh edges, ditches, and freshwater swales. Slender, alternate leaves and flexible stems give it a wind-swept, informal character, while its early-season catkins provide important nectar for pollinators. This tree also provides significant habitat and cover for wildlife.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Sycamore
Saltmarsh Mallow
Frogfruit

TOLERANCES:

High Flood
Medium Drought
Medium Salt

Hercules' Club

Zanthoxylum clava-herculis

A deciduous native with plenty of character, Hercules' Club grows 20–35 feet tall and is recognizable by the knobby, cork-like spines that stud its trunk and branches. It thrives in full sun to part shade and tolerates a wide range of well-drained soils. Aromatic, citrus-scented foliage supports a variety of pollinators. Late summer clusters of bright red fruits attract birds and other wildlife. Often referred to as the toothache tree, the bark and leaves create a numbing effect when chewed and were used by Native Americans and early settlers as a toothache remedy.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Longleaf Pine
Sea Oats
Dune Sunflower

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Low Drought
Medium Salt

Carolina Laurel Cherry

Prunus caroliniana

Carolina Laurel Cherry is an evergreen small tree that matures to 15–35 feet tall and grows best in full sun to partial shade. Once established, it has good drought tolerance. When crushed, its glossy leaves have a maraschino cherry fragrance. Small, black berries form after the tree's elegant, fragrant white flowers bloom. Flowers attract butterflies and bees, and the fruit is relished by songbirds and small mammals. The berries are only to be eaten by wildlife as they are poisonous to humans.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Live Oak
Passionflower
Blanket Flower

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
High Drought
Medium Salt

Eastern Red Cedar

Juniperus virginiana

An evergreen, coniferous tree with fine, aromatic foliage, Eastern Red Cedar forms a dense, conical screen and typically reaches 30–40 feet tall. It is tolerant of a variety of growing conditions but performs best in full sun and moist soils. Its gray to reddish-brown exfoliating bark provides nice contrast to its needled, dark blue-green leaves. This tree provides excellent winter cover for wildlife and its frosted-blue, berry like cones feed a variety of birds and small mammals.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Shumard Oak
Eastern Redbud
Muhly Grass

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
High Drought
High Salt

Southern Red Cedar

Juniperus virginiana var. silicicola

A great choice for the coast, this needled, evergreen tree keeps a tight, feathery silhouette and reaches 30 feet tall. It excels in full sun and well-drained soils, taking salt spray, wind, and drought in stride. Southern Red Cedar is right at home on the maritime edges and back dunes. Aromatic foliage provides screening year-round, while silvery-blue cones on female trees feed birds and lend winter color.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Red Bay
Muhly Grass
Seaside Goldenrod

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
High Drought
High Salt

Sassafras

Sassafras albidum

A deciduous, aromatic flowering tree, Sassafras grows 30–60 feet tall. It is easily recognizable by its uniquely shaped, bright green leaves that are either ovate, mitten-shaped, or three-lobed with a pale underside. In spring, it produces delicate yellow-green flowers that support early pollinators, followed by clusters of bluish-black drooping berries relished by birds and mammals. Fall colors light up the landscape with showy red, orange, and yellow foliage.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

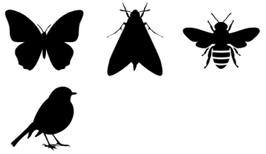
WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:



PAIRS WELL WITH:

Sycamore
Eastern Redbud
Meadow Beauty

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
High Drought
Low Salt

Palmetto

Sabal palmetto

A true emblem of the Carolina coast, the Palmetto is a stately, evergreen palm that reaches 30–65 feet tall. It is a solitary-trunked palm that thrives in full sun and is remarkably resilient, with high salt and wind tolerance. It is perfectly suited for beachfronts, maritime forests, marsh edges, and other exposed coastal landscapes. In summer, creamy white, fragrant flowers attract a variety of pollinators. In the fall, blue-black fruits are enjoyed by many mammals and birds, while foliage provides important nesting habitat.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

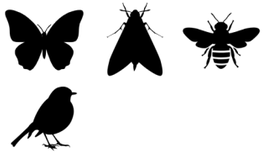
WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:



PAIRS WELL WITH:

Live Oak
Muhly Grass
Seaside Goldenrod

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
High Drought
High Salt

Black Cherry

Prunus serotina

Black Cherry is a woody, deciduous tree that can reach 60–80 feet tall. It grows best in full sun and in soil with good drainage. In the spring, small white flowers mature, providing nectar for a variety of pollinators. Drooping clusters of round, purple to black fruit attract birds and small mammals. In the fall, foliage turns orange, yellow, and gold. When crushed, the leaves and reddish-brown twigs smell of bitter almonds.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

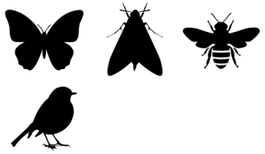
WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:



PAIRS WELL WITH:

American Holly
Longleaf Pine
Purple Lovegrass

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Medium Drought
Medium Salt

Southern Magnolia

Magnolia grandiflora

An iconic broadleaf evergreen with glossy, leathery leaves, Southern Magnolia matures to 60–80 feet tall with a full, pyramidal crown. The underside of the leaves are rusty-brown and tomentose. It performs best in full sun to part shade and well-drained soils, tolerating heat and drought once established. From late spring into summer, it opens large, fragrant, ornamental white flowers that attract a number of pollinators, followed by upright cone-like fruits studded with red seeds that are adored by birds and small mammals.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

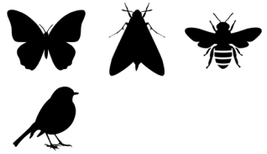
WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

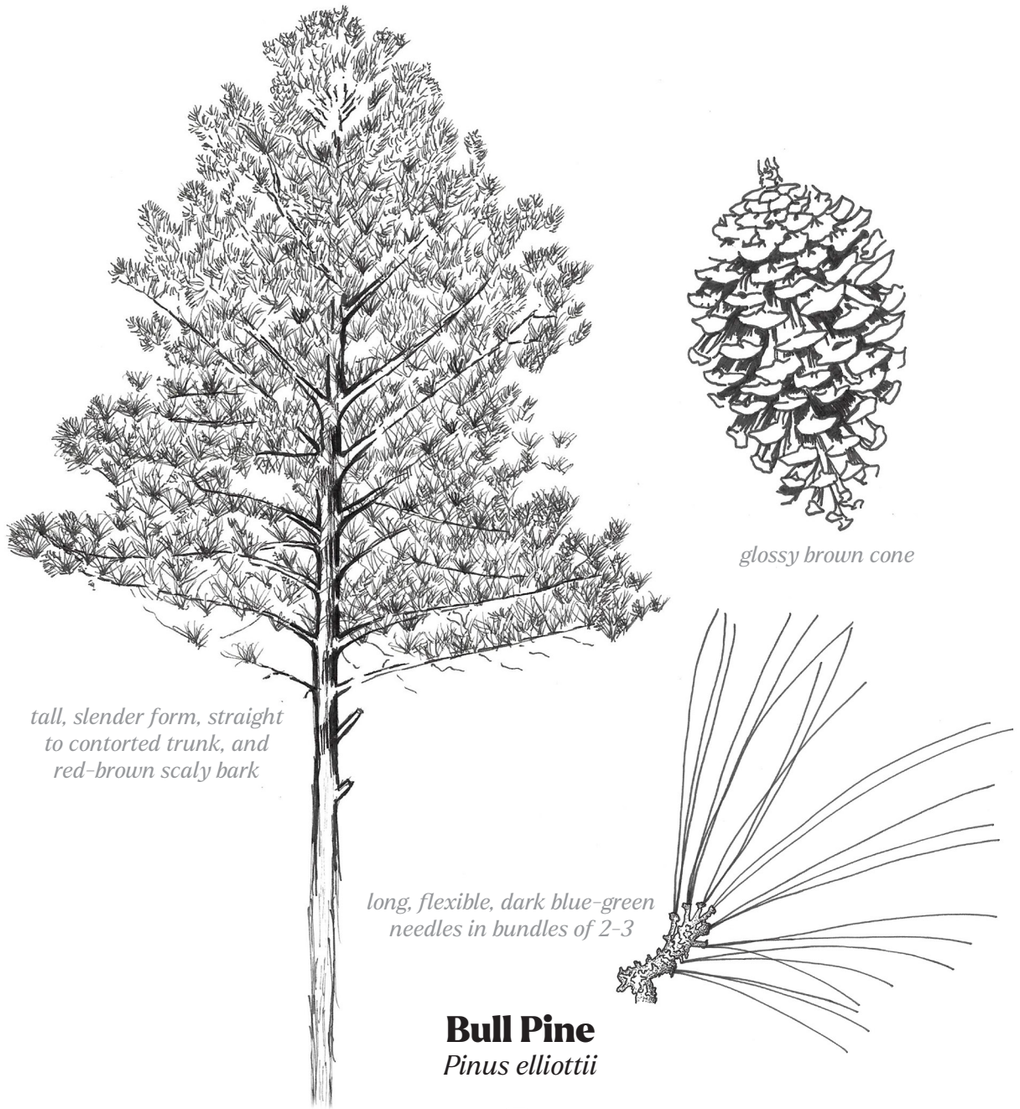


PAIRS WELL WITH:

Live Oak
Muhly Grass
Cinnamon Fern

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Medium Drought
Medium Salt



Bull Pine

Pinus elliottii

An evergreen coastal plain native built for sun and heat, bull pine matures to 60–100 feet tall with a straight trunk, high canopy, and long, glossy needles in tufts. It prefers moist to seasonally wet soils, yet established trees handle summer drought. Thick bark and quick juvenile growth reflect its fire adapted roots, while large cones act as a food source for wildlife. Its evergreen foliage also provides shelter for birds and small mammals. Bull Pine grows well in well-drained sites along ponds or streams. Lower limbs tend to drop as the tree matures.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Sabal Minor
Heath Aster
Eastern Columbine

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
High Drought
High Salt

Live Oak

Quercus virginiana

A defining tree of the Lowcountry, Live Oak is a majestic, long-lived evergreen that grows 40–80 feet in height and width. Its massive, low limbs create sweeping, cathedral-like canopies that thrive in full sun to part shade. It is adapted to coastal conditions and shows excellent tolerance to salt, wind, and drought. The small, dependable acorns feed a variety of mammals and birds, while the tree's dense, glossy foliage offers year-round shade and habitat.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Southern Magnolia
Yaupon Holly
Beautyberry

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
High Drought
High Salt

ESTUARINE ECOSYSTEM

MESIC ECOSYSTEM

Fringe Tree

Chionanthus virginicus

A small, deciduous tree that reaches 12–20 feet tall, Fringe Tree grows best in full sun to part shade and handles summer heat once established. It has a rounded habit and can be trained as a single trunk or multi-stemmed specimen. In spring, fragrant clusters of creamy white flowers with fringe-like petals unfurl, attracting a variety of pollinators. Summer brings clusters of black, olive-like fruit that are eaten by songbirds and small mammals. Foliage turns yellow in fall before dropping in winter.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Pollutant Filtration:

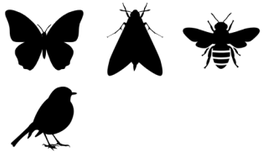
WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:



PAIRS WELL WITH:

Bald Cypress
Longleaf Pine
River Oats

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Medium Drought
Low Salt

Dahoon Holly

Ilex cassine

A slender, evergreen coastal native, Dahoon Holly reaches 20–30 feet tall with an upright, dense habit. It grows best in full sun to part shade and moist to wet soils, tolerating freshwater inundation. In spring, modest, yellow-white flowers appear, attracting pollinators. Its berries are red-orange and very small, growing in clusters and supporting wildlife through fall and winter. Plant Dahoon Holly along rain gardens, pond edges, or in sheltered coastal spots where root disturbance will be minimal.

RESILIENCY:

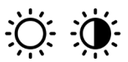
Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:



ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

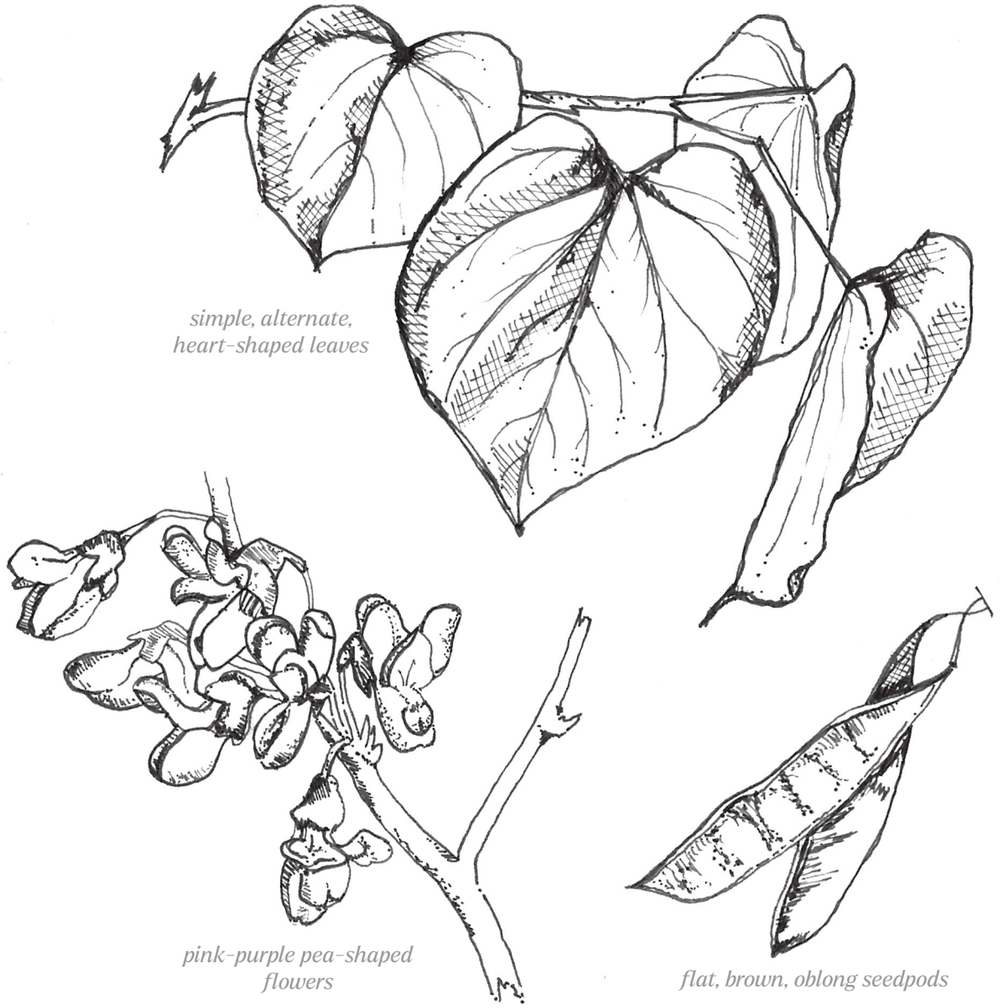
ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Overcup Oak
Sabal Minor
Saltmarsh Mallow

TOLERANCES:

High Flood
Low Drought
Medium Salt



Eastern Redbud
Cercis canadensis

Eastern Redbud

Cercis canadensis

An ornamental, deciduous, understory tree, typically reaching 20–30 feet tall with a rounded crown, Eastern Redbud grows best in part shade to full shade and adapts to summer heat once established. Rose-pink flowers open on bare wood in early spring, attracting a variety of pollinators, then give way to brown, flat seed pods. Songbirds and small mammals enjoy the seeds. During fall, broad, heart-shaped leaves display vibrant yellow, orange, pink, and purple before they drop.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Pignut Hickory
River Oats
Sweet Pepperbush

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
High Drought
No Salt

Sweetbay Magnolia
Magnolia virginiana

Sweetbay Magnolia

Magnolia virginiana

A deciduous to semi-evergreen native, Sweetbay Magnolia prefers full sun to part shade and has short-term freshwater flood tolerance. Typically reaching 10-35 feet tall, it often grows multi-stemmed with a narrow, upright habit and glossy leaves with silvery undersides. Fragrant, solitary, creamy-white flowers appear in mid-spring. In the fall, cone-like aggregates mature, supplying bright red, shiny seeds that dangle by a thread and are adored by birds and small mammals.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:
low med high

Flood Mitigation:
low med high

Air Filtration:
low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Longleaf Pine
Black Cherry
Cinnamon Fern

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Low Drought
Medium Salt

Blackgum

Nyssa sylvatica

A deciduous native with a clean, architectural habit, Blackgum typically reaches 30–70 feet tall. It grows in full sun and can handle summer dry spells once established. Small clusters of green-white flowers bloom in spring and summer, attracting pollinators. Its bluish-black drupes of fruit are edible, yet sour, and enjoyed by a variety of birds and small mammals. Foliage turns to fiery reds and oranges during the fall. With freshwater flood tolerance and moderate salt tolerance, plant it along rain garden edges, in swales, or at protected inland sites.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

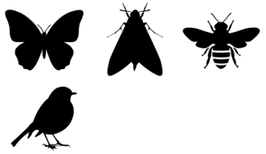
WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:



PAIRS WELL WITH:

Loblolly Bay
Saltmarsh Mallow
Whitetop Sedge

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Low Drought
Medium Salt

Black Willow

Salix nigra

A fast growing, deciduous, wetland native, Black Willow typically reaches 30–60 feet tall with a spreading, rounded crown. It thrives in full sun to part shade and can be found along stream/river banks, marshes, ponds, and floodplains. Finely textured, long leaves give it a soft, wind-swept silhouette. Early season catkins provide a valuable nectar source for pollinators, while dense branching offers cover for birds and other wildlife. Site in a more naturalized area with moist to wet soils where erosion control is needed.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

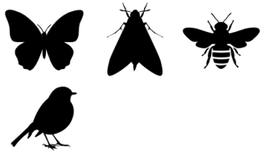
WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:



PAIRS WELL WITH:

Pawpaw
Leucothoe
Mountain Mint

TOLERANCES:

High Flood
Low Drought
High Salt

Southern Catalpa

Catalpa bignonioides

A deciduous native with a short, thick trunk, Southern Catalpa forms a rounded crown and typically reaches 30–60 feet tall. It prefers full sun to part shade and moist, well-drained soils, yet tolerates seasonal, freshwater flooding. In summer, white, bell-shaped, ornamental flowers with yellow and purple spots appear, attracting bees. Following the flowers, long, narrow, dark brown seed pods ripen and release the seeds from fall to winter. The Southern Catalpa is the host plant to two native moths.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Pollutant Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Live Oak
Yaupon Holly
Virginia Sweetspire

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
High Drought
Low Salt

Loblolly Bay

Gordonia lasianthus

An evergreen coastal-plain native that reaches 35–70 feet tall, Loblolly Bay matures with a columnar growth habit and a narrow, compact crown. It thrives in full sun to part shade and prefers consistently moist soils, showing good freshwater flood tolerance. In summer, fragrant, waxy white flowers that resemble camellias appear on the end of its branches, attracting pollinators with its nectar. Its foliage acts as a food source to white-tailed deer and also provides winter coverage for wildlife.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Longleaf Pine
Sabal Minor
Fetterbush

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Low Drought
Low Salt

Laurel Oak

Quercus laurifolia

A deciduous to semi-evergreen coastal plain oak, Laurel Oak grows 40-60 feet tall with a dense, rounded crown. It thrives in full sun to part shade and handles moist, occasionally flooded soils with ease. It has low to moderate salt tolerance and is best kept out of direct spray zones. Spring catkins followed by round, dark brown striated acorns in the fall provide food for birds and mammals. Its narrow, glossy leaves lend a refined texture through the growing season before shifting to yellow-bronze tones in the fall.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Flame Azalea
Winged Sumac
Sabal Minor

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Medium Drought
Low Salt

American Beech

Fagus grandifolia

A deciduous classic with smooth, light gray bark, American Beech matures to 60–80 feet tall with a broad, dense crown. It prefers moist, well-drained soils and full sun to part shade. In spring, it bears subtle yellow-green flowers. Male flowers form in drooping clusters while female flowers form in short spikes and give way to triangular beechnuts that feed wildlife. Leaves turn golden bronze in fall, and on young branches, the papery tan foliage often persists through winter.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

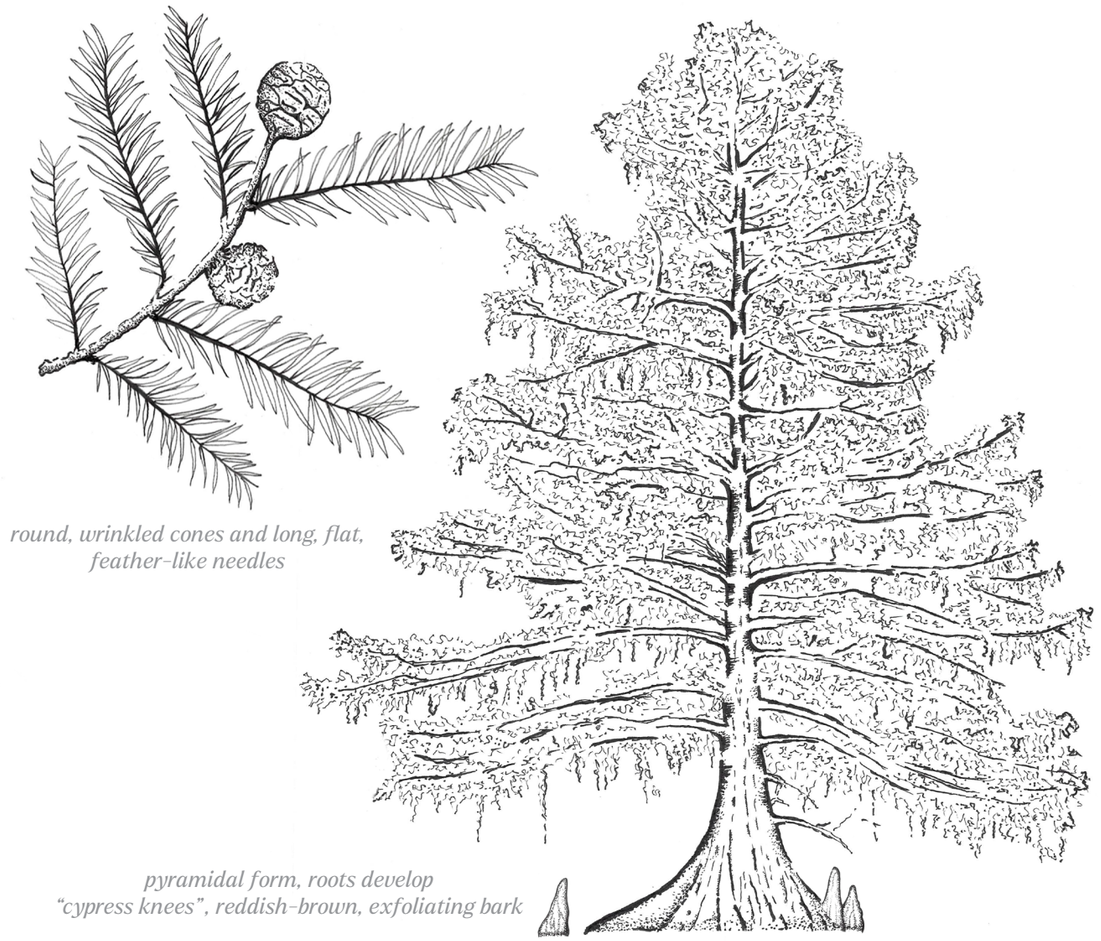
ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Devil's Walkingstick
Jack-in-the-Pulpit
Coral Bean

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Medium Drought
Medium Salt



Bald Cypress
Taxodium distichum

Bald Cypress
Taxodium distichum

A long-lived, deciduous conifer, Bald Cypress rises 70–110 feet in height. Its fluted trunk and signature buttressed base grows narrower as it rises, giving way to its classic pyramidal form. It thrives in full sun and wet to seasonally flooded soils. Distinctive cypress "knees" may develop in saturated soils, adding sculptural interest and aiding in stability. Feathery, bright green needles soften its bold form, and turn a warm copper-bronze in fall before dropping. Round, wrinkled cones appear in fall and its seeds feed a variety of birds and small mammals.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:
low med high

Flood Mitigation:
low med high

Air Filtration:
low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:
Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:
Swamp Chestnut Oak
Sabal Minor
Swamp Milkweed

TOLERANCES:
High Flood
Medium Drought
Medium Salt

Loblolly Pine

Pinus taeda

A fast-growing needled evergreen, and one of the most common pines in the Southeast, Loblolly Pine rises 60–100 feet tall with a straight trunk and open, airy crown. It offers good drought tolerance once established, and has low salt tolerance, so it is best sited behind the dune line or in inland areas. It prefers full sun and medium to wet soils. As the tree ages, its bark becomes thick with an irregular, plate-like shape. Cylindrical, rusty-brown cones form in the fall and are 3 to 6 inches long, attracting small mammals and birds to feed on their seeds.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Live Oak
Sabal Minor
Carolina Jessamine

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Medium Drought
Low Salt

Longleaf Pine

Pinus palustris

An evergreen icon of the Southern coastal plain, Longleaf Pine matures to 60–100 feet tall with a straight trunk and an irregular crown. Long clusters of needled leaves grow closely together in threes on fascicles, creating a bundle at the end of each branch. It thrives in full sun and well-drained, sandy soils. Salt tolerance is low, so plant it in protected sites. Longleaf Pine does not produce flowers, instead, it produces showy, brown, oblong cones that grow 6 to 15 inches long. Their seeds drop and provide food for birds and small mammals.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Fringe Tree
Sabal Minor
Switchgrass

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
High Drought
Low Salt

Southern Cottonwood

Populus deltoides

The Southern Cottonwood is a deciduous, fast growing, giant and can reach up to 80–120 feet tall, developing a straight trunk and a broad, open crown. It thrives in full sun and moist to wet soils and is able to withstand occasional freshwater flooding. It is best placed well inland or in protected coastal pockets as it has low salt tolerance. Red and yellow catkins appear in spring, followed by tufts of cotton-like seeds that are dispersed by the wind. A variety of pollinators, birds, and mammals are attracted to this tree.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Swamp Chestnut Oak
Dahoon Holly
Lizard's Tail

TOLERANCES:

High Flood
Medium Drought
Low Salt

American Sycamore

Platanus occidentalis

A deciduous, fast growing giant of the floodplains and riverbanks, American Sycamore matures to 75–120 feet tall with a massive trunk and a broad, spreading crown. Its signature mottled, brown to gray bark peels to reveal patches of white, green, and tan, adding year-round interest to the landscape. Large, maple-like leaves cast deep shade and turn golden yellow to brown in the fall. Showy, fuzzy seed balls appear in the fall and persist into winter, feeding a variety of songbirds.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Estuarine, Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Titi
Saltmarsh Mallow
Buttonbush

TOLERANCES:

High Flood
High Drought
Medium Salt

MESIC ECOSYSTEM

Red Buckeye

Aesculus pavia

A small, ornamental, deciduous tree that makes a big impact in the landscape, the Red Buckeye reaches 15–25 feet tall and is a beacon for wildlife. It prefers partial shade and moist soils. Showy, orange-red tubular flowers appear in early spring and attract hummingbirds and pollinators that feed on its nectar. In fall, leathery capsules form and hold 1–3 shiny, brown seeds that are relished by wildlife. The smooth buckeye seeds are striking but poisonous, so look, don't taste.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

American Beech
Strawberry Bush
Bloodroot

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Low Drought
No Salt

American Holly

Ilex opaca

A broadleaf evergreen with glossy, spiny leaves and a pyramidal form, American holly matures to 40–60 feet tall. It thrives in full sun to part shade and well-drained soils. In spring, clusters of greenish white flowers bloom, followed by bright red berries in the fall that persist through winter. The flowers attract a variety of pollinators and the red berries are eaten by songbirds and mammals. The evergreen foliage acts as cover for wildlife during the winter.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Red Buckeye
Carolina Allspice
Cinnamon Fern

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
Medium Drought
Medium Salt

Overcup Oak

Quercus lyrata

A deciduous bottomland species, Overcup Oak rises 45–75 feet tall with a sturdy trunk and rounded crown. It thrives in full sun and prefers well drained sites, despite naturally occurring in flood prone areas. Yellow catkins bloom in spring, followed by acorns in the fall. Its distinctive acorns, nearly enclosed by their caps, are a reliable food source for birds and small mammals. Leaves turn soft yellow to copper in fall, giving this resilient oak a warm seasonal presence.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic

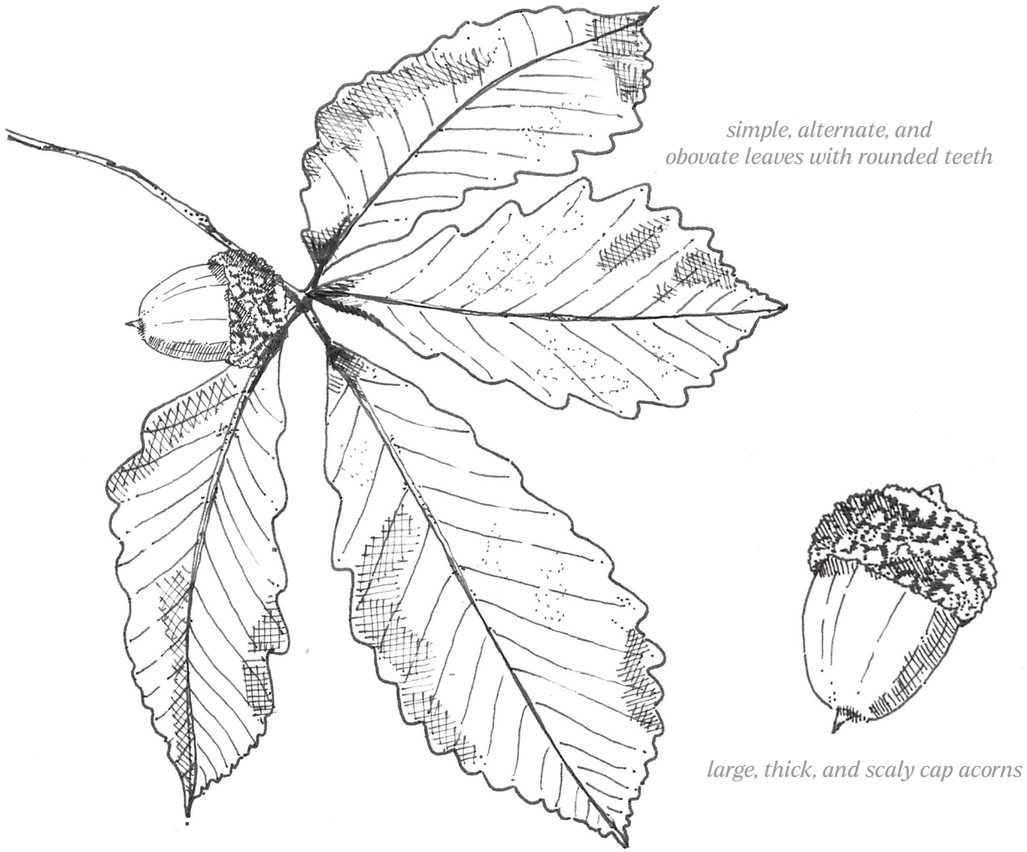
ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Carolina Willow
Swamp Milkweed
Whitetop Sedge

TOLERANCES:

High Flood
Low Drought
Low Salt



simple, alternate, and obovate leaves with rounded teeth

large, thick, and scaly cap acorns

Swamp Chestnut Oak
Quercus michauxii

Swamp Chestnut Oak

Quercus michauxii

A deciduous bottomland standout, the Swamp Chestnut Oak reaches 60–100 feet tall with a broad crown and thick, furrowed bark. It thrives in full sun to part shade and moist soils, showing short-term freshwater flood tolerance. Its shiny green leaves have wavy margins and rounded teeth, and turn yellow to brown in the fall. In spring, yellow catkins bloom and are 2–4 inches long. Fall brings clusters of scaly capped acorns that are sweet tasting and relished by wildlife, making this tree a high value food source for a number of birds and mammals.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic

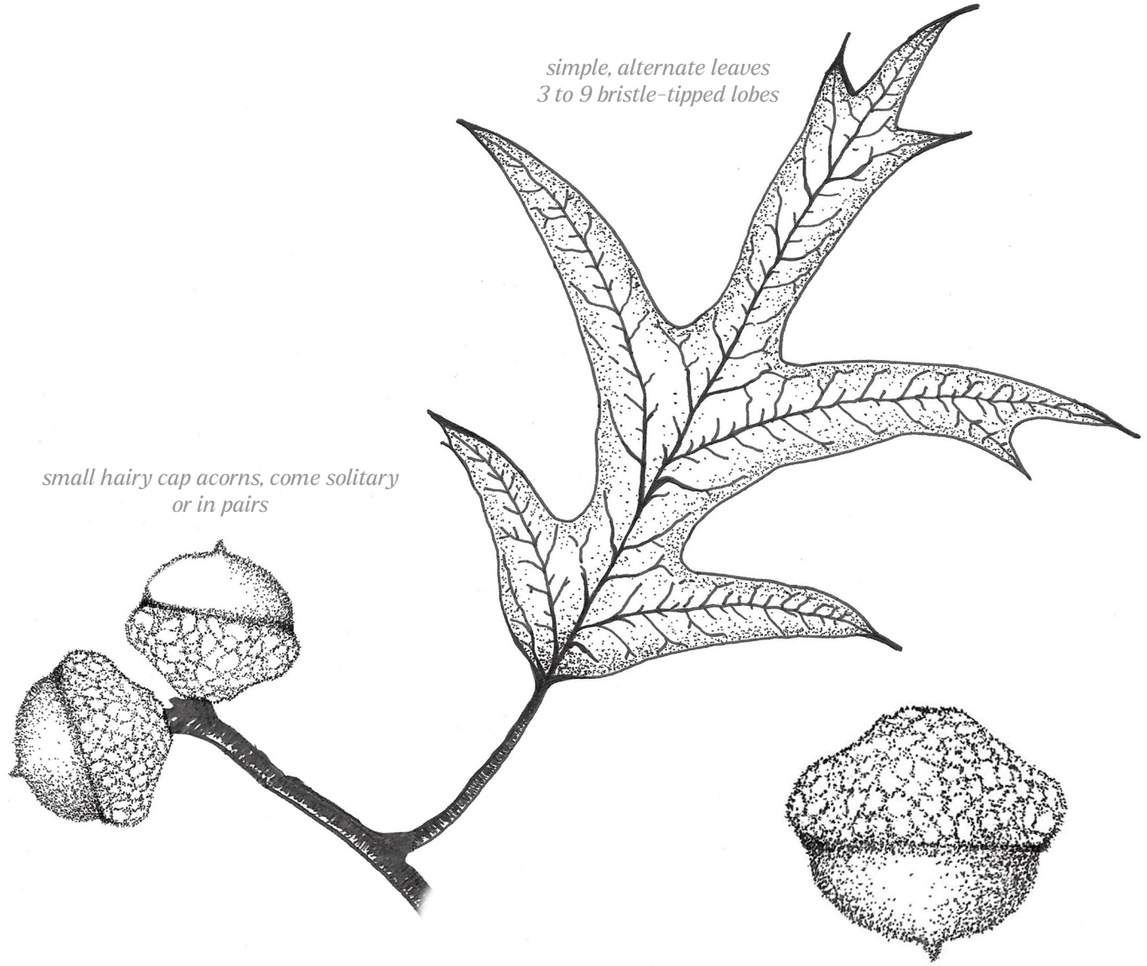
ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Bald Cypress
Inkberry
Horse Sugar

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Low Drought
Low Salt



Southern Red Oak
Quercus falcata

Southern Red Oak

Quercus falcata

A deciduous oak with a broad, open form, Southern Red Oak matures to 60–80 feet tall with a high, airy crown and gray, scaly bark. It thrives in full sun and well-drained soils, showing notable heat and drought tolerance once established. Its deeply lobed leaves turn rusty reds to warm copper tones in the fall, and its reliable acorn crop supports a wide range of wildlife. Due to its low salt tolerance, it's best planted in protected, inland or leeward sites.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:
low med high

Flood Mitigation:
low med high

Air Filtration:
low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:
Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:
White Oak
Beautyberry
Purple Lovegrass

TOLERANCES:
Medium Flood
High Drought
Low Salt

Willow Oak
Quercus phellos

Willow Oak

Quercus phellos

A deciduous oak that rises 60–100 feet tall and forms a tall, refined crown feathered with its signature narrow, willow-like leaves. It thrives in full sun and moist to seasonally flooded soils, showing strong freshwater flood tolerance. It has low salt tolerance. Yellow-green catkins appear in spring, followed by small, brown, striated acorns. A variety of wildlife is attracted to this oak, ranging from butterflies and songbirds to white-tailed deer. In fall, the leaves shift to soft golds and warm browns.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic

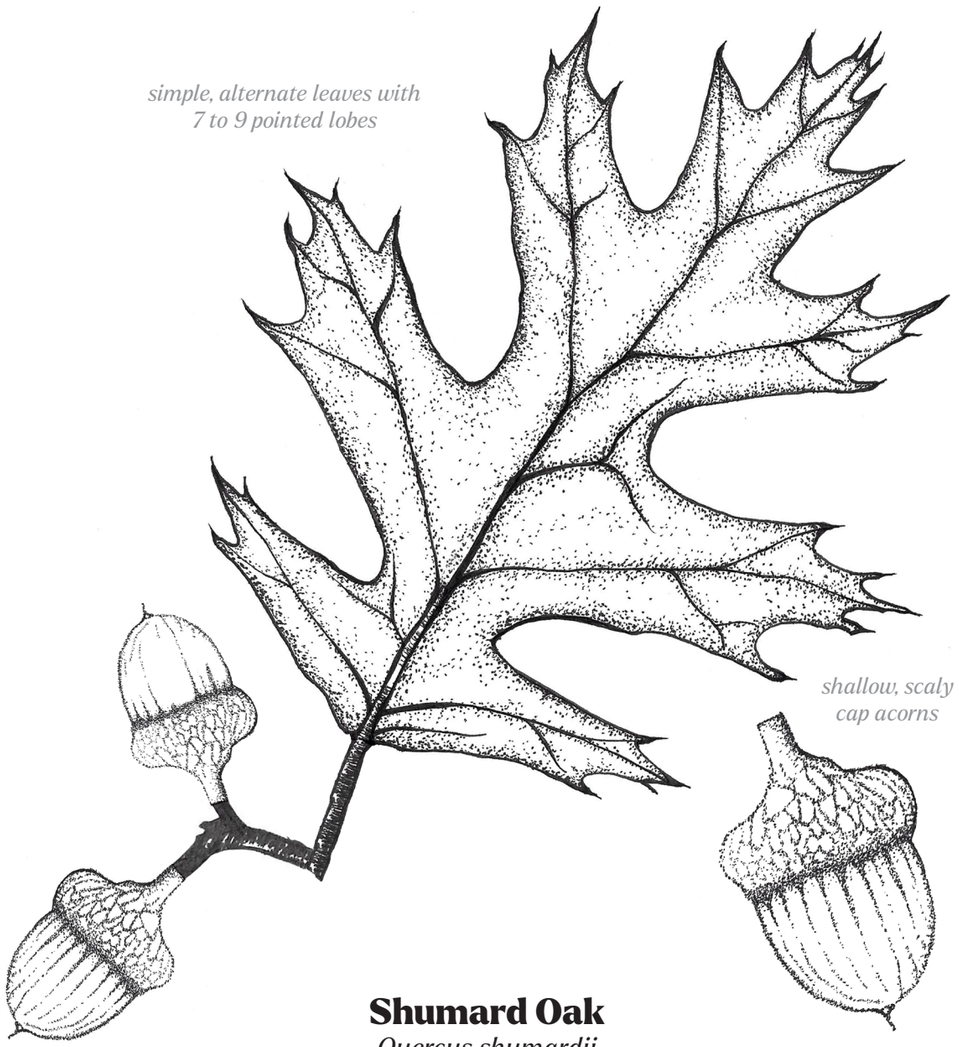
ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

White Oak
Tough Bully
Snow Squarestem

TOLERANCES:

High Flood
High Drought
Low Salt



Shumard Oak
Quercus shumardii

Shumard Oak

Quercus shumardii

A deciduous oak of impressive stature, the Shumard Oak grows to 60–90 feet tall, with a straight trunk and a broad, high canopy that provides generous shade. It performs best in full sun and tolerates summer heat and brief flooding, but shows low salt tolerance. Its large, sharply lobed leaves turn a vivid scarlet to deep burgundy in fall, often holding color longer than many other oaks. It is a strong, long-lived species that offers structure, seasonal drama, and habitat value through its heavy acorn crops.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:
low med high

Flood Mitigation:
low med high

Air Filtration:
low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Pignut Hickory
Winged Sumac
Cinnamon Fern

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
High Drought
Low Salt

Scarlet Oak

Quercus coccinea

A deciduous upland oak with a tall, clean trunk and a broad, open crown, Scarlet Oak reaches 50–80 feet tall. It shines brightest in autumn with foliage igniting into deep reds and scarlets that can hold late into the season. It thrives in full sun and well drained soils, making it at home on dry ridges and slopes. Its bark becomes darker and develops character as it ages. Slender catkins bloom in spring, followed by shiny acorns that are covered by a deep, bow-shaped cap. Acorns are eaten by a number of birds and mammals.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Carolina Laurel Cherry
Yaupon Holly
Heath Aster

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
Medium Drought
Low Salt

White Oak

Quercus alba

White Oak is a long-lived deciduous tree, maturing to 80–100 feet tall. It grows best in full sun to partial shade. Its distinct leaves have finger-like lobes with rounded tips and change to a dark reddish brown in fall. It prefers full sun to part shade and moist soils. Small, reddish, less showy flowers appear on female trees, followed by an abundance of tan-brown acorns with warty scales. A variety of birds and mammals enjoy eating the acorns and depend on the oak's dense crown and hardwood trunk for nesting and cover.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

Flood Mitigation:

Air Filtration:

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Red Buckeye
Carolina Sedge
Horse Sugar

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
Medium Drought
Medium Salt

MESIC
ECOSYSTEM

MARITIME
ECOSYSTEM

Pignut Hickory

Carya glabra

A resilient, deciduous native, Pignut Hickory forms a tall, straight trunk with a rounded, open crown that reaches 60–80 feet tall. It prefers full sun to light shade and well-drained soils. As it matures, the tree develops deep roots that lend good drought tolerance. Spring catkins attract pollinators. Glossy leaflets turn clean yellow in fall, and hard, husked nuts feed wildlife. Pignut Hickory is best sited where its height and strong wood can mature without crowding.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic, Maritime

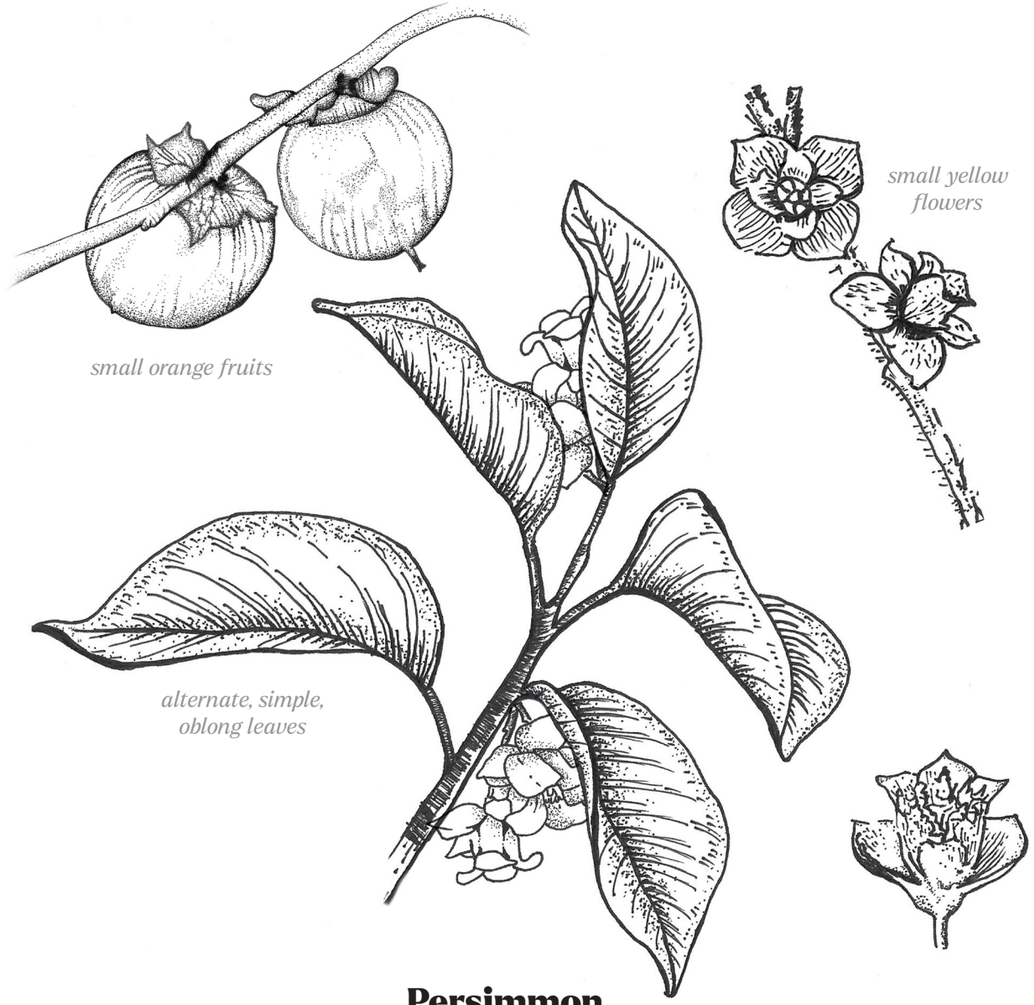
ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

American Beech
Strawberry Bush
Yarrow

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
High Drought
Low Salt



Persimmon
Diospyros virginiana

Persimmon

Diospyros virginiana

A deciduous, woody native, the Persimmon matures to 30-80 feet tall with a straight trunk and blocky, dark bark. It grows well in full sun to part shade and well-drained soils, handling drought and dry conditions once established. In spring, small bell shaped flowers appear, followed by globular, orange fruits that feed a variety of wildlife (and patient humans). Foliage shifts from yellow to reddish-purple in fall before its leaves drop.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Carolina Willow
Buttonbush
Cherokee Sedge

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
Medium Drought
Low Salt

Shagbark Hickory

Carya ovata

A deciduous tree named for its peeling, shaggy bark, Shagbark Hickory matures to a tall, straight 70–90 feet tall with an open crown. It prefers full sun to part shade and deep, well drained soils. Its deep roots provide good drought tolerance once established. Spring catkins attract pollinators and lead to sweet nuts prized by wildlife and foragers. Foliage turns a clean yellow in fall, and the loose bark plates offer roosting niches for bats, birds, insects, and small reptiles.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Walter's Viburnum
Mayapple
Jack-in-the-Pulpit

TOLERANCES:

Low Flood
High Drought
Medium Salt

Pecan

Carya illinoinensis

A deciduous, long-lived tree, the Pecan develops a straight trunk and broad canopy, reaching 70–100 feet tall. It thrives in full sun to part shade and deep, well-drained, moderately moist soils. Young Pecan trees appreciate steady water, while established roots handle heat well. Spring catkins give way to clusters of oval, edible nuts that feed wildlife and humans alike. Foliage turns soft yellow in fall. These trees are best sited in large spaces where their height and spread can mature without crowding.

RESILIENCY:

Carbon Storage:

low med high

Flood Mitigation:

low med high

Air Filtration:

low med high

WATER NEEDS:

LIGHT NEEDS:

ECOSYSTEM:

Mesic, Maritime

ATTRACTS:

PAIRS WELL WITH:

Eastern Redbud
Cherokee Sedge
Virginia Creeper

TOLERANCES:

Medium Flood
High Drought
Low Salt

Acknowledgements

With heartfelt appreciation to the Town of Sullivan's Island for its commitment to advancing coastal resilience and for ensuring this information is accessible to all who call the island home.

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The trees featured in this guide were selected because they are native to the southeastern United States and most are known to occur naturally on Sullivan's Island, as well as for their habitat value, resilience, and suitability to local coastal conditions. Site characteristics, however, vary considerably from property to property, including differences in soil type, moisture, sun exposure, wind, and salt influence. This guide is intended as an informational resource to support property owners in considering native tree options; before selecting and planting a species, property owners are encouraged to undertake additional research and, when possible, consult with a qualified arborist, nursery professional, or landscape architect.

Sullivan's Island Town Hall | 2056 Middle Street| Phone: 843-883-5727 | Fax: 843-883-3009

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