

AMERICAN SYCAMORE

Platanus occidentalis L.

OTHER COMMON NAMES: American planetree, Buttonball-tree, Buttonwood: Planetree.

FORM: Most massive tree of Eastern North America, commonly 50-100 feet tall, diameter of trunk 3-8 feet, may reach height 150-170 feet, with diameter of trunk 11 feet, trunk erect or often declined, tapering, continuous through the oblong head or soon breaking up near the ground into several large, massive limbs to form a broad, rounded, irregular crown.

BARK: At the base on old trunks, 2-3 inches thick, dark brown, deeply furrowed with broad ridges which peel off as dark brown scales; on young trunks and large limbs, the bark is much thinner, flakes off during the early summer in large plates, exposing a whitish, yellowish, or greenish inner bark.

TWIGS: Rather stout, zigzag, at first green and pubescent, later brownish to gray.

FLOWERS: Appear on the growth of the season when the leaves are about 1/4 developed, monoecious, borne in capitate heads, staminate and pistillate flower heads on different stalks; staminate are axillary and dark red; pistillate terminal, greenish, often tinged with red.

LEAVES: Alternate, simple, broadly ovate, 3-5 lobed, toothed on the margin, 4-10 inches across, bright green above, pale green and white woolly below; petioles about 2 inches long with enlarged hollow bases; conspicuous stipules encircle the twig.

FRUIT: Usually in a single brown head about 1 inch in diameter, suspended from a slender stalk, heads composed of many hairy achenes about 3/4 inch long.

WINTER BUDS: Alternate, terminal bud absent, ovate to conical, obtuse or acute, lustrous, orange-brown 1/8-3/8 inch long, surrounded by base of the leaf stalk or leaf scars.

WOOD: Hard, heavy, straight, close-grained, weak, reddish-brown with light to yellowish sapwood.

USES: Lumber, pulp, furniture. Historical uses: veneer, boxes, crates, woodenware, interior finish.

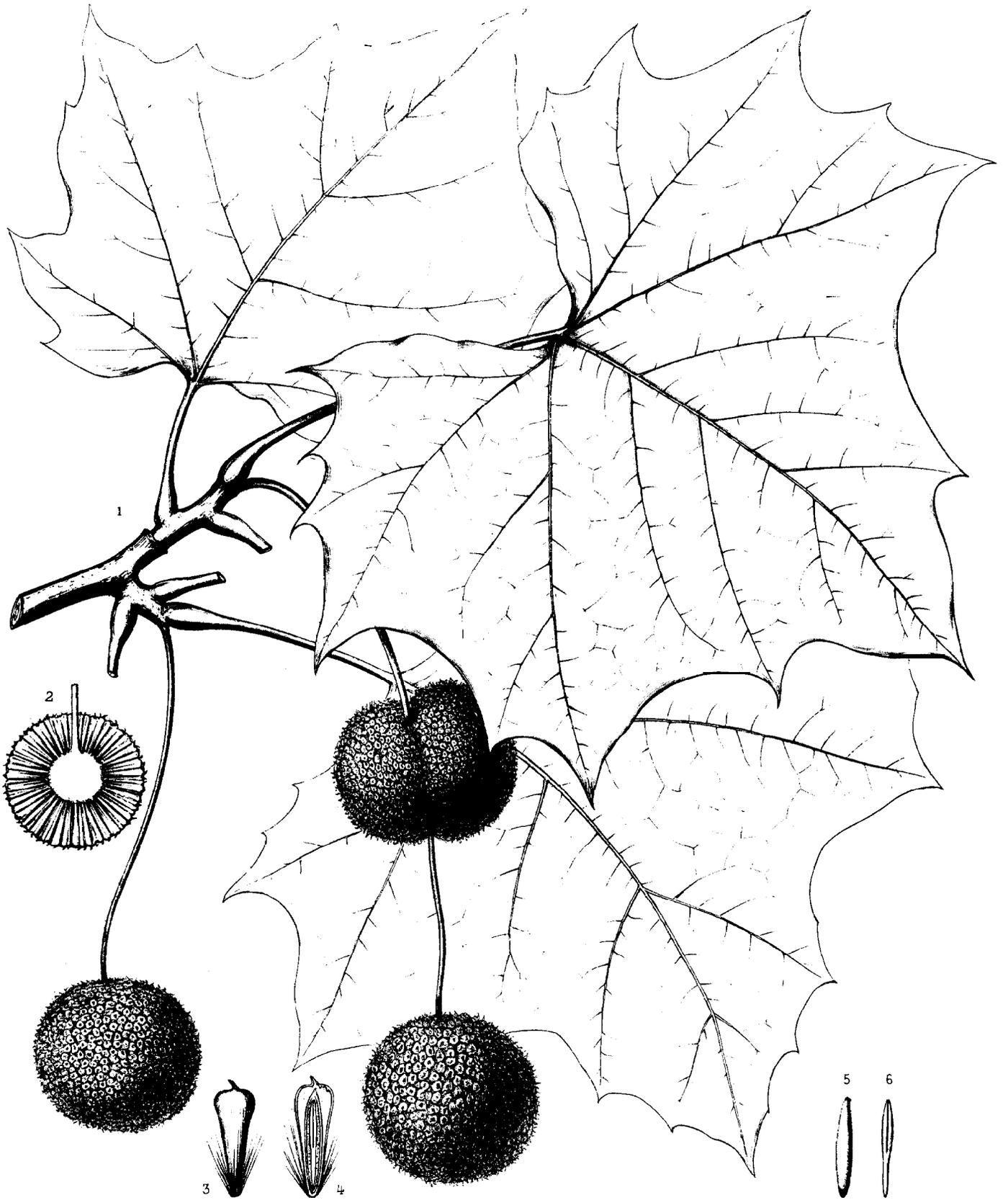
HABITAT: Prefers deep, rich, moist soils of creek and river flats, around borders of swamps and lakes.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS: Whitish, yellowish or greenish bark of the upper branches which at times covered with large scales of outer bark; large leaves with hollow base petioles; buds covered with a single scale; fruit a more or less spherical head usually borne single.

DISTRIBUTION IN ALABAMA: Seems to be widely distributed over the state outside the regions of longleaf pine.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. A fruiting branch | 4. Vertical section of an achene |
| 2. Vertical section of head of fruit | 5. A seed |
| 3. An achene | 6. An embryo |



Platanus occidentalis L.