



**Common Name:** NUTMEG HICKORY

**Scientific Name:** *Carya myristiciformis* (Michaux f.) Nuttall

**Other Commonly Used Names:** swamp hickory, bitter water hickory

**Previously Used Scientific Names:** *Hicoria myristiciformis* (Michaux f.) Britton

**Family:** Juglandaceae (walnut)

**Rarity Ranks:** G4/S1

**State Legal Status:** Rare

**Federal Legal Status:** none

**Federal Wetland Status:** FACW-

**Description:** Deciduous **tree** up to 115 feet (35 meters) tall and 2 feet (60 cm) in diameter. **Bark** is brownish-gray and shaggy, peeling off in long strips or plates. **Twigs** with metallic sheen, coated in silvery scales. **Buds** at the tips of twigs less than ¼ inch (6 mm) long, plump, covered in yellow-brown hairs and silvery scales. **Leaves** 12 - 24 inches long (30 - 60 cm), alternate, with 7 - 9 toothed, opposite leaflets; dark green above, covered with bronze or silver

scales beneath. **Female and male flowers** on same tree; female flowers tiny, nutlike, at tips of twigs; male flowers in drooping catkins. **Fruit** with a thin, golden-scaled husk that opens along 4 winged seams, releasing a single, round, thick-shelled **nut**, reddish-brown with silver stripes.

**Similar Species:** No other hickory species has twigs, buds, leaves, and nuts coated with golden or silvery metallic scales. Pale hickory (*Carya pallida*) leaflets have silvery-tan scales on the lower surface, but its bark is tightly woven in a diamond pattern and it occurs in dry, upland forests.

**Related Rare Species:** See butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) on this website.

**Habitat:** Coosa Valley flatwoods, bottomland forests and moist hillsides over calcium-rich soils.

**Life History:** Nutmeg hickory is shade-tolerant as a young tree and may persist in the understory for many years until a sunny gap opens up in the canopy. As a mature tree, it is intolerant of shade. Trees flower April–May and are wind-pollinated. Nuts are produced every 2 - 3 years, beginning when the tree reaches about 30 years of age; peak bearing age is 50 - 125 years old. The nut matures in the autumn and falls September–December. It is reddish-brown with silver stripes, resembling a nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*), thus inspiring both common and scientific names. The nuts are sweet and rich in oils, but the shells are so thick that few are eaten by animals, although they are relished by squirrels.

**Survey Recommendations:** Surveys are best conducted during growing season when leaves are out although bark and twigs are distinctive during the winter.

**Range:** Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Mexico. Although widespread, nutmeg hickory it is rare throughout most of its range.

**Threats:** Logging, clearing, and conversion of habitat to pine plantations.

**Georgia Conservation Status:** Two sites, with a total of about 100 trees, are known; both are on private land.

**Conservation and Management Recommendations:** Protect sites from logging and clearing.

#### **Selected References:**

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Grauke, L. J. 2005. Introduction to the genus *Carya*. U.S.D.A.-ARS Pecan Genetics, Somerville, Texas. <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/carya>

Kirkman, L.K., C.L. Brown, and D.J. Leopold. 2007. Native trees of the southeast. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon.

Maisenhelder, L.C. and J.K. Francis. 1990. Nutmeg hickory. *In*, Silvics of North America, Vol. 2, Agriculture Handbook 654. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington D.C.  
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Weakley, A.S. 2007. Flora of the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia, and surrounding areas. University of North Carolina Herbarium, Chapel Hill.

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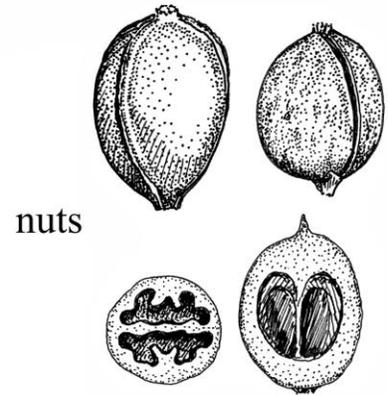
**Date Compiled or Updated:**

L. Chafin, Oct. 2007: original account

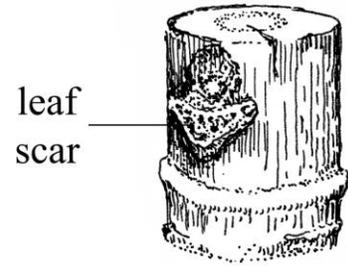
K. Owers, Jan. 2010: updated status and ranks, added pictures

Z. Abouhamdan, April 2016: updated link

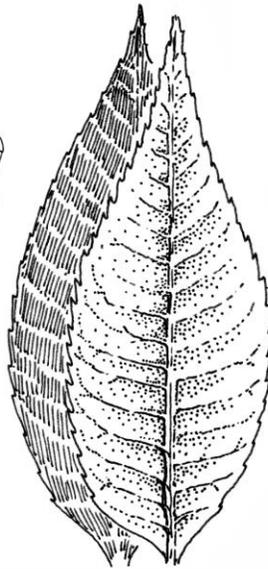
NUTMEG HICKORY - *Carya myristiciformis*



nuts



leaf  
scar



scales on lower  
surface of leaf