

# The Beech — One of the Noblest Trees

By L. C. BREED

**A**MONG the trees that are utilized for ornamental purposes is the beech. There are several reasons why this tree has been selected for use in this way, and the principal ones will be mentioned.

The beech is widely distributed and grows well in a variety of soils. It is a massive tree, often reaching a height of over one hundred feet, with a girth of upwards of twenty feet. It thrives in extremely cold weather, and fairly challenges the snow on its limbs by the frosty white of its smaller branches and twigs. It does well when subjected to intense heat if it has plenty of light. Its vitality is very high and it sometimes attains an age exceeding eight hundred years.

In the high forest it has a long, clean stem, but in the open it branches out near the base, and its spreading, broadly conical crown and deep shade renders it a splendid ornamental tree. In winter the branch-work is practically elegant; the limbs rise steeply, the branches sweep up and out, and from them rise the twigs in regular combs. The bark is fine and smooth and changes from iron to silver grey in color.

The leaves are oval, pointed, smooth, dark and lustrous. The freshness of their spring green and silky texture in youth are unrivalled. In autumn they change to a fine russet with tints of purple when wet. In young trees and hedges the withered leaves cling to the twigs through the winter. In the bud the leaf is folded fan-wise, and the folds run parallel with the nerves. They expand into an oval, smooth-faced leaf, with slightly scooped edges, and a most delicate fringe of short gossamer which falls off later.

The beech flowers in April and May. The blossoms are rather more conspicuous than is the case with the oak. In early summer, whilst the leaves are still pellucid, the shade of a large beech is particularly inviting. Later, the leaves become opaque, and their glossy surfaces throw back the heat rays. Then, the play of light upon the great mass of foliage is very fine; but in autumn when the leaves have turned from deep green to orange and warm

ruddy brown and they catch the red rays of the westering sun, the tree appears to be turned into a blazing fire.

The drip of the beech destroys most of the soil-exhausting weeds, its shade protects the soil from over-evaporation, and the heavy crops of leaves enriches it by their decomposition. The leaves are rich in potash and as they readily decay they produce an admirable humus.

Since our trees are leafless nearly one-half the year, the beech has a great appeal owing to its winter beauty which is only equalled, though not surpassed, by that of the elm. Then, the sinewy strength of its trunk is most evident, the white of its bark is the clearest, the structure of its noble head is most apparent, and the fine spray of its delicate branches stands clear-cut in exquisite tracery against the sky.

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