



COFFEETREE WORKS WELL AS CITY TREE

By DOUGLAS J. CHAPMAN

Kentucky Coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioica*) is an exciting tree that offers potential in parks, as a city street tree or in the individual landscape. It is tolerant of difficult soil conditions, is a good competitor, will thrive when grown in grassy areas and has few or no insect problems.

The habit is somewhat oval-crowned with vertical ascending branches, reaching an ultimate height of 60 to 75 feet with a 35- to 45-foot spread. It is a rather coarse-textured tree with the bark being rough with vertical scaling ridges. It is interesting in that it adds to the coarse texture with a grey to dark

brown color.

The 36-inch long, 24-inch wide bipinnately compound leaf is extremely coarse in texture. In the spring as it comes out, it is a very pale green, changing to dark green mid-spring to a blue-green in mid-summer. Although some have suggested that fall color is ineffective, in central Michigan we have a good clear yellow developing. The fruit are reddish-brown pods, 5 to 10 inches in length, containing a few large blackish-brown round seeds. The seed pods remain and hang on the trees for the entire winter, adding to its coarse, almost grotesque habit.

Kentucky Coffeetree should be transplanted balled and burlapped deep into rich, moist, fertile soil, but as mentioned above, it is adapt-

able to a wide range of conditions from a sandy loam to a rather heavy clay-loam found in many urban soils. It is somewhat drought tolerant, therefore, usually thrives in well-drained versus poorly drained soils. Pruning is most effective and causes the least problems when done during early spring.

There are no catastrophic insect or disease problems to affect this plant. It joins a select list of trees well suited as city street trees—Hackberry, Scarlet Oak, Honey Locust, and Common Horsechestnut.

When one is considering a tree for difficult urban conditions which require little or no maintenance and yet has a rough silhouette similar to elm, Kentucky Coffeetree should come to mind. **WTT**

Douglas Chapman is a Horticulturist at Dow Gardens, Midland, Michigan.