



Hamamelis virginiana Witch-Hazel¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

Witch-Hazel grows best in sun or partial shade and in light, moist soil (Fig. 1). The plant tolerates some drought and grows slowly. It grows 20 to 30 feet tall and spreads 15 to 25 feet forming a multistemmed, shrubby, round, somewhat asymmetrical ball. Removing the lower branches helps produce a more tree-form multistemmed specimen but regular minor pruning will be required to maintain it in this form since the plant suckers freely from the base of the trunk.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Hamamelis virginiana*
Pronunciation: ham-uh-MEE-liss ver-jin-ee-AY-nuh
Common name(s): Witch-Hazel
Family: *Hamamelidaceae*
USDA hardiness zones: 4 through 8 (Fig. 2)
Origin: native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; reclamation plant; specimen; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION

Height: 20 to 30 feet
Spread: 15 to 25 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: round; vase shape
Crown density: moderate

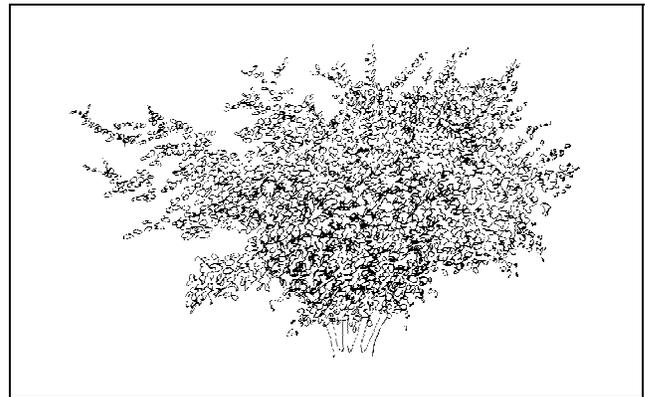


Figure 1. Young Witch-Hazel.

Growth rate: slow
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: sinuate; undulate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); obovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: yellow
Fall characteristic: showy

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristics: fall flowering; pleasant fragrance; inconspicuous and not showy; winter flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: irregular; round

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown; gray

Current year twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in the shade; tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: none

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

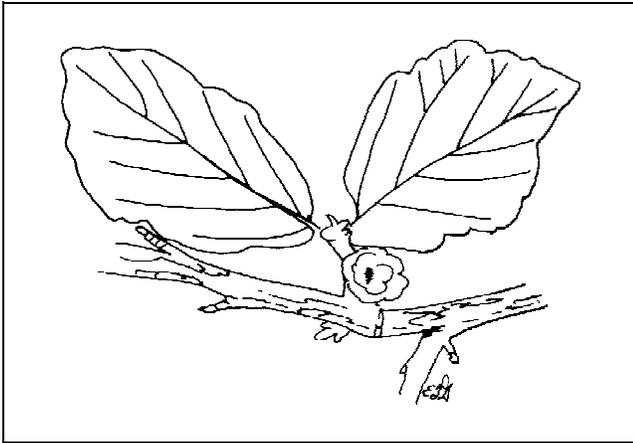


Figure 3. Foliage of Witch-Hazel.

USE AND MANAGEMENT

The fragrant flowers are produced in late fall to early winter and have straplike, yellow petals and is the last shrub to flower during the year. The flowers are more interesting than ornamental, however, there are selections with more showy flowers. The fall color is yellow and often is at its peak when the flowers are out.

Plants are found along stream banks in the shade in its native range where they appear open and poorly branched. However, under cultivation in full or partial sun they develop a fuller, rounded crown. Probably not for clay soils. Although galls are frequently found on the leaves, they are usually not serious pests on the plant.

One cultivar is listed: 'Rubescens' - reddish petals.

Pests

Usually no pests are serious.

Saddled prominent is a green to brown or yellow caterpillar with a reddish brown spot on its back. It eats the leaves.

Witch-Hazel leaf gall aphid causes galls 1/2-inch-long. The galls are green, sometimes with reddish tips, and are formed on the upper leaf surfaces. No real lasting harm will be done by these galls. Natural enemies usually control this insect; hand picking and destroying infested leaves will also be helpful. Horticultural oil applied before the plant grows may help control this insect.

The spiny Witch-Hazel gall aphid causes galls 3/4-inch-long with long, coarse spines. The galls are green tinged with red. Both this aphid and the previous one migrate to birch for part of their life cycle. Spray with horticultural oil for some control.

Eastern tent caterpillar feeds on Witch-Hazel leaves. Removing the nest by tearing out the web and crushing the contents or pruning out the infested branch will control the infestation.

Diseases

Usually no diseases are serious.

Several genera of fungi are listed as causing leaf spot on Witch-Hazel but they will not require control.

Various genera of powdery mildew cause a white coating on the leaves.