



# White Poplar *Populus alba* L.

**Common Names:** White poplar, silver-leaved or silverleaf poplar

**Native Origin:** Central and southern Europe to western Siberia and central Asia. It was chiefly planted as an ornamental for its attractive leaves of contrasting color but is rarely used today for that purpose.

**Description:** White poplar is a tall deciduous tree in the Willow family (Salicaceae) that may reach 70 feet or more in height and 2 feet in diameter. The smooth, greenish-white bark becomes dark and rough on older trees. Young green or brown twigs are coated with dense woolly hair, especially near the tip. A cross-section of the stem reveals five-pointed, star-shaped pith. The 2 to 5-inch simple leaves are oval to maple-leaf in shape with 3-5 broad teeth or lobes, and are dark green above and covered with dense white hair below. Male and female flowers are borne in catkins on separate trees and appear sometime in March and April. The small seeds are adorned with cottony fluff. Mature trees produce thousands of wind-dispersed seeds that may be carried over long distances. It spreads primarily by vegetative means, through root suckers. Large numbers of suckers from single tree can quickly develop into a dense colony.



**Habitat:** It favors full sun habitats such as fields, forest edges and wetland fringes. It is frequently found in old home sites from which it spreads into surrounding forest and field.

**Distribution:** This species found in forty-three states in the contiguous United States as reported from states shaded on Plants Database map.



**Ecological Impacts:** This strong competitor grows in a variety of soils, produces large seed crops, and re-sprouts easily in response to damage. It escaped and spread from original planting sites to out-compete native tree and shrub species and interferes with the normal progress of natural community succession. Dense stands reduce the amount of sunlight, nutrients, water and space available for other plants.

### Control and Management:

- **Manual-** Hand pull seedlings and young plants. The entire root system, or as much of it as possible, should be removed to prevent re-sprout from fragments. Hand removal of plants is best achieved after a rain, when the soil is loose. Cut large trees with power or manual saws. Girdling will kill the parent tree but may require follow-up cutting or treatment of sprouts with an herbicide. Prescribed burning can be effective, but repeated burns are needed. Cutting and prescribed burning are best used together.
- **Chemical-** It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate or triclopyr. **CAUTION:** Because glyphosate is a non-selective systemic herbicide, it may kill other grasses, broad-leaved herbaceous and woody plants that it contacts. Triclopyr kills broadleaf (dicotyledonous) plants but causes little or no damage to grasses and is useful for areas where desirable grasses are to be maintained. There are many possible ways to apply such herbicides, e.g., on foliage, on cut stems, as an injection, or as a basal spray directed to the bark of uncut stems. Repeat applications may be necessary to reduce densities. Follow label and state requirements. Managers should evaluate the specific circumstances of each infestation, seek professional advice and guidance if necessary, and use the herbicide in a manner that is consistent with the product label and other state requirements

**References:** <http://plants.usda.gov>, [www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/poal1.htm](http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/poal1.htm), [www.cnr.vt.edu/dendro/dendrology/syllabus/factsheet.cfm?ID=308](http://www.cnr.vt.edu/dendro/dendrology/syllabus/factsheet.cfm?ID=308), [www.invasive.org/browse/subject.cfm?sub=3066](http://www.invasive.org/browse/subject.cfm?sub=3066), Glass, W.D. 1992. Vegetation management guideline: white poplar (*Populus alba* L.). *Natural Areas J.* 12(1): 39-40.

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