



# KENTUCKY COFFEE TREE

*Gymnocladus dioica*

Bean or Pea Family (Caesalpiniaceae)

Zones: 5-8

Full Sun

Moderate Water

Location: Amphitheater, Visitor Center

The Kentucky Coffee Tree is a very hardy and versatile tree. It is a medium to large shade tree, growing to 50 or 60 feet tall. Growing the Kentucky Coffee Tree requires some patience; it is a slow to medium grower, and as a young tree is often described as a 'gangly teenager'. With age, it will develop a very picturesque and distinctive character. For botanists, this tree is unique as it is one of the few that have large bi-pinnately compound leaves. The overall leaf can sometimes be up to 3 feet long and is composed of many leaflets.

The Coffee Tree has many uses in industry such as: fence posts, railway sleepers, cabinet work, fine furniture, and general construction. The fruit can be used as soap, as it is high in saponins. It is usually kept away from livestock, as the leaves and raw seeds are toxic. The beans were, however, once used by settlers as a coffee substitute, which is where the common name of the plant is derived. If this is done, toxic effects can be avoided by cooking the beans for at least three hours at 150 degrees.

It has green foliage all summer and turns yellow for spectacular fall color. Kentucky Coffee Trees typically have separate male and female trees. However these trees can also have "perfect" flowers, with both male and female parts. The flowers are said to be fragrant, but are typically not noticed unless effort is made to search out the fragrance. Selecting a known male clone will minimize the production of bean pods and thus reduce yard waste. However, these 5 inch or longer pods are typically not abundant.