

# Ginkgo

(*Ginkgo biloba*)

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Looking for a Water-Wise tree? If you are, you might try ginkgo, known botanically as *Ginkgo biloba*.

The species name of “biloba” comes from the distinctive leaf pattern, typically with two lobes on fan-shaped leaves with parallel vein patterns. It is a popular pattern for pottery and artwork because of its distinctiveness and beauty.

Originally from Asia, this species comes with a fascinating history. It is a very ancient tree, known extensively from the fossil record and is extinct in wild habitats. In fact, fossils indicate that it once had many living relatives from most continents on earth, including North America.

So how did this species survive to become part of our garden repertoire? According to a website at The University of California, Berkeley (<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/seedplants/ginkgoales/ginkgo.html>), it survived because Buddhist monks in China and Japan cultivated it in their temple gardens as a sacred tree. Individual trees can reach as high as 60 feet and live for a thousand years or more under the right conditions.

If you purchase one for your garden, you will most likely be buying the male form of this dioecious species. The reason is that the female “fruits” surrounding the seed create a very unpleasant smell when they decompose. To quote from the Berkeley website, “In the horticultural literature, it is variously referred to as “disagreeable,” “evil,” “offensive,” “disgusting”, “repulsive”, and “abominable,” and is often compared to the odor of vomit. It is due to the malodorous chemical compound butyric acid . . .it is the same compound that gives rancid butter its “distinctive” smell.

This is an ideal tree for Oregon because it does the best in climates that have a Mediterranean pattern of light summer rainfall. It is considered to be relatively free of pests and diseases as well. The fall color, which in the best years is a bright golden yellow, is spectacular.

To learn more and view more pictures, visit the OSU landscape plant site at <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ldplants/gibi.htm> .

