

The Cottonwood Tree Is an Awesome Sight!

By Joan Mish

Along the bike trail last week I saw the most amazing trees and trunks. Actually the trunks of the cottonwood tree were more amazing than the tree. The cottonwood trees have very broad trunks. The bark is very deeply furrowed and is fairly white. The barks were important to the Native Americans for they used them for dugout canoes. The center of the trunk is soft and flaky.

The bright green foliage in summer changes to brilliant yellow in the fall. In fact the yellow leaves have already started to fall. The leaves look a bit like a spade on a card.

There are male and female trees. All that cotton we see on the bike trail is from the female tiny red blooms and had a massive amount of seeds in the cotton. They make a mess on the trails.

The trees need a location in full sun and lots of moisture. They are the fastest growing tree in North America. They can grow up to 100 feet tall but in one year a young tree grows about six feet. The mature tree spreads its branches about 75 feet to 100 feet. And the diameter of the tree grows about 4-5 feet per year.

The bark provided forage for horses and a bitter, medicinal tea for their owners. Sweet sprouts and inner bark were a food source for both humans and animals. The trees also served as trail markers and meeting places for both Native Americans and early European settlers.

Today, the pulp made from cottonwood yields high-grade book and magazine paper, however. The wood is often used to make pallets, crates and boxes.

The tree usually lives about 75 years.