



American Witch Hazel

Hamamelis virginiana L.

The American Witch Hazel is a small flowering perennial shrub or tree that belongs to the order of Saxifragales (Saxifragales), an order which includes astilbe, stonecrops, and jade plants. Our Witch Hazel is one of three species of Witch Hazel that are native to North America. Its range is from Nova Scotia to Florida and from the Great Lakes to eastern Texas. Witch Hazel likes partial shade and moist soil and can be found growing in woodlands, along streams and in The Great Swamp.

American Witch Hazel is a shrub-like small tree that grows to heights of 20 to 30 feet and widths of 15 to 20 feet. It has smooth thin brown bark and green oval leaves arranged alternately on the branches. Clusters of bright yellow flowers with four creamy ribbon-like petals appear in mid to late fall. It can be the only color you see in the woods in the winter months. The flowers offer a fragrant nectar to attract moths that pollinate the flowers.

The fruits of the Witch Hazel are brown fuzzy capsules that grow in pairs. The fruit ripens during the summer one year after pollination. And then each capsule explodes, scattering black, oily, edible seeds 10 to 20 feet from the mother plant. The seeds only sprout after two winters! The empty pods remain on the plant after the seeds are gone. American Witch Hazel is the only tree in North America to have flowers, fruit, and leaf buds all at the same time.

Witch Hazel fruits are an important food source for pheasants, grouse, bobwhites, white tail deer, beavers, and black bears. The forked branches of Witch Hazel have a lengthy history of use by dowsers to locate underground water sources for wells.

Witch Hazel was long harvested for its medicinal and cosmetic properties. Native American cultures used the bark and leaves of the plant to create remedies for various ailments including swellings and tumors. Witch Hazel is used for its astringent and anti-inflammatory properties to make ointments, tea, soap, and lotions.

American Witch Hazel flowers around the age of 6 years. The life span is 40 to 50 years.