

Plant of the Week

# *Liriodendron tulipifera*

## The Tulip Tree



The **North American Tulip Tree** is another tree with ancient origins and first appeared in the fossil record in the late Cretaceous, continuing through the Tertiary to the present day. There are now only two extant species,

*Liriodendron tulipifera* from North America and *Liriodendron chinense* from China, although fossils were once widely distributed throughout the northern hemisphere (circum-polar), from North America to Central Asia and Europe. It is believed that aridity associated with the last ice age contributed to its extinction in Europe. The name *Liriodendron* comes from the Greek, **Lirion** – a **lily or tulip**, and **dendron** – a **tree**.

*Liriodendron* is closely related to *Magnolia*, in fact, they both belong to the same family, the **Magnoliaceae**. If you look closely at the flowers, even though the colours are so very different, you can see a marked similarity. However, it is a big tree, fine for parks but not recommended for the average home garden.

In North America, *Liriodendron tulipifera* is much loved and often referred to as the “Tulip Poplar” or “Poplar” although it is not even closely related to Poplars (*Populus* spp.). The American poet, **William Cullen Bryant** (1794 – 1878) wrote:

*“The tulip-tree, high up,  
Opened in airs of June,  
Her multitude of golden chalices to humming birds,  
And silken-winged insects of the sky.”*  
(from: “The Fountain”)

The tree in the courtyard was planted in May, 1994. At first, there was considerable resistance to the planting of a tree in this central location. However the tree is now well established and is treasured for its flowers in spring, shade in summer, golden foliage in autumn, and for the sun that streams through its bare branches in winter.

*Alison Downing & Kevin Downing, 25.10.2010*

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Map: en.academic.ru