



Plant Profile: Purple Beech or Copper Beech
Fagus sylvatica f. *purpurea*

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Fagus sylvatica f. *purpurea* is a large, deciduous tree with a dense pyramidal or rounded spreading crown which provides a lush canopy. The leaves of the Purple Beech are a deep purple color in the spring and summer, and turn to a copper-red color in the fall. The Purple Beech grows up to 50 to 60 feet in height, with a spread of up to 40 feet in width, making an imposing silhouette in a larger landscape. Like the common European beech, *F. sylvatica*, is native to central and southern Europe, and is smaller and more adaptable than the American beech, *F. grandifolia*.

There is a group of different purple-leaved European beech trees known as the Astropurpurea Group, which include Purple beech trees with leaf color covering a range of hues, from pale purple with hints of green, to bronze-purple, to a dark purple-black color. The leaves of the Purple Beech are shorter in size with wavy untoothed edges and prominent veins. The dark purple color of the leaves in spring and summer provide a stark contrast to the green hues of most deciduous trees. The trees retain their dead leaves throughout the winter, shedding them in early spring as new leaves emerge.

Fagus sylvatica f. *purpurea* produces small yellow-green flowers in early spring. The tree is monoecious, with both male and female flowers appearing on the same tree. The male flowers appear in long-stemmed drooping clusters, while the female flowers grow in short spikes, and produce triangular nuts encased in a spiny outer casing. The nutmeat is long, slender and three-sided, and although the flavor may be bitter because of the quantity of tannin they contain. The nuts do provide a food source for wildlife.

Purple beech trees are easy to propagate from seed, and do better when transplanted during their dormant season. They have a wide, shallow root system, and prefer moist, well-drained acidic soil in a sunny location. They are deer-resistant. Purple beech trees may be shaped into a hedge, with heavy pruning. Their branches tend to touch the ground, and coupled with the tannins from fallen beechnuts, the growth of grass is often restricted under tree canopy.

<https://awaytogarden.com/copper-or-purple-beech-a-tree-worth-waiting-for/>

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/copper-beech/>

<https://www.gardenia.net/plant/fagus-sylvatica-purpurea>

<https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=265856&isprofile=0&>