

BOTANY  
**NATURE RAMBLINGS**



Hackberry

➤ ONE OF the most widely distributed of American forest trees, even though not an especially abundant one, is the hackberry. Its several New World species range from southern Quebec westward as far as Washington and Oregon and southward into Texas and Florida.

On the Atlantic seaboard it is not very plentiful, but scattered specimens keep one reminded of its presence. It prefers the deep rich soil of moist river terraces, though it will grow well in cultivation almost everywhere.

It is really a handsome tree, with straight, clean-cut trunk usually a foot or so in diameter, though occasionally reaching as much as three or four. The bark is unmistakable—rough, ridged, pebbly. No other tree has a bark quite like it. The twigs are fine and slender, often afflicted with the fungus disease known as witches' brooms. The leaves are more or less like those of the elm, to which the tree is rather closely related.

The hackberry is used occasionally as a street tree, although its trick of striving for height without branching trunk does not make it a favorite for that purpose. No planting scheme should ignore it entirely, however, because it is one of the most characteristic American trees.

Where conditions are favorable, its straight, rough barked trunk lifts its crown

of dark-green leaves 80 feet or more into the air. In drier places its height will not reach more than half that, but the tree nevertheless maintains its upright, sturdy, symmetrical growth.

Because of its scarcity in most parts of the country, it has but little use as lumber. The wood is heavy and soft, without much strength, but yields itself readily enough to working. It finds some utilization in the making of cheap furniture, boxes, loose barrels, and similar more or less lowly occupations. But it is better left alive than killed for such nondescript ends.

There is a second species of the tree in this country, the Mississippi hackberry; it is more strictly confined to the wet river bottoms. It is distributed along the great river and its principal tributaries, as well as in other parts of the South, but does not leave the streambanks when it invades the North.

A third species, which most of us would pass up as a mere bush or imperfect example of one of the other two, is found occasionally, especially in the South.

The name of the tree might seem at first to promise something choice in the way of fruit, but any expectations of that sort would be doomed to disappointment. The tree bears berries, but they are 99% stone and 1% pulp—only a hard round seed with a skin pulled over it.

Science News Letter, October 6, 1951

MEDICINE

**10 Viruses Range Globe, May Have Common Ancestor**

➤ A GROUP of about 10 viruses, all related in unique but complicated ways, ranges over almost the entire globe.

Many of them can cause severe sickness in man and his domestic animals.

Regions of the world included in their range are eastern Asia, Japan and many of the Pacific Islands, the United States, Central Africa, the United Kingdom, Central Europe, Colombia and Brazil.

These 10 world-ranging viruses may all come from a common stock, or ancestor. They are all about the same size. In most cases they are carried to man and domestic animals by infected mosquitoes. In every instance, however, there is probably some wild reservoir in nature.

Monkeys play a prominent role as reservoir for the yellow fever virus. Various birds are involved in four kinds of encephalitis, the brain disease sometimes called sleeping sickness. Besides the birds involved as reservoirs in St. Louis, eastern and western equine (horse) and Russian encephalitis, rodents have been incriminated in Russian encephalitis.

A systematic study of new viruses found in South American and African forests has been carried on by the International Health Division Laboratories of the Rockefeller Foundation.

Science News Letter, October 6, 1951

INVENTION

**Better Iron Castings Made By Adding Metal Alloy**

➤ BETTER castings of iron are promised by use of an alloying composition on which a patent was granted recently. The addition of this composition changes the molecular structure of castings to give a finer and more uniform grain.

The inventor is Frank Alden Miller, St. Petersburg, Fla. Patent 2,563,056 was issued to him. Rights are assigned to H. J. Dion Company, a corporation of Michigan.

Science News Letter, October 6, 1951

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