

Forest Communities of Iowa



Upland Forests

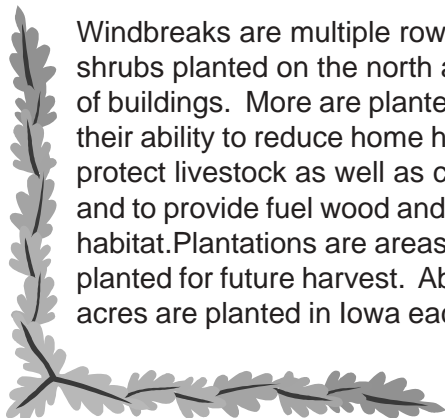
Comprised mostly of various species of oak and hickory trees, or central hardwoods, upland forests make up the largest chunk of Iowa's forest land. There is approximately 900,000 acres of oak-hickory upland forest and 700,000 acres of sugar maple basswood forests in Iowa.

The types of trees found in the upland forests of Iowa depend upon the amount of moisture as well as many other variables. Red oak and bur oak as well as shagbark hickory and bitternut hickory survive where the land is drier. As the soil slopes and gains moisture, red oaks join into the mixture. In the more moist areas of the Iowa upland you can find black walnut, white ash, sugar maple and basswood.

Trees of the upland forests are beloved for a variety of reasons. Whether it is seen as a symbol of nature's beauty blooming in the spring or a home for squirrels, deer, birds or other animals, the trees of the upland forest are most valuable in sustaining an ecosystem. These trees are also used by humans for a variety of products. Oak is most recognized in the making of furniture but is also used for flooring, paneling, and fuelwood. Hickory, because of its great strength, is valuable in making tool handles, flooring, plywood, and charcoal. The sap of the sugar maple is used to make maple syrup.

Human Planted Forests

Windbreaks are multiple rows of trees and shrubs planted on the north and west sides of buildings. More are planted each year for their ability to reduce home heating bills, protect livestock as well as crops and soil, and to provide fuel wood and wildlife habitat. Plantations are areas of trees planted for future harvest. About 10,000 acres are planted in Iowa each year.



Floodplain Forests

Located near Iowa's major rivers, floodplain forests make up another large portion of the forest life in the state. Also known as bottomland forests, roots of trees such as silver maple, green ash, and hackberry trees as well as cottonwood, willows and boxeldes are developed to withstand flooding and a lack of oxygen for long periods of time. The combination of elm, ash, and cottonwood trees make up 700,000 acres of Iowa's forest land.

The trees of the floodplain are used primarily for lumber, veneer and firewood. They are also home to a large amount of wildlife.

Also part of the floodplain forest are riparian areas, or the land next to lakes, streams and wetlands. Riparian areas are made up of some of the trees mentioned above, as well as shrubs like dogwood and chokecherry, and grasses like canarygrass and switchgrass.

Riparian areas are valuable for their ability to control soil erosion, land runoff and flood damage. It also creates a habitat for wildlife and provides food for fish.

Urban Forests

The trees in Iowa's cities and towns make up another important forest resource in Iowa, its urban forest. Each Iowa city boasts about 45 different tree species. Green ash, silver maple, Norway maple, and sugar maple are the most popular species in Iowa's urban forest since the 1960's. Before then, the American elm dominated the soils of Iowa towns. However, overplanting and an outbreak of "Dutch elm disease" led to the planting of the urban forests we now know.

Urban forests protect towns the same way riparian areas protect the floodplains. Many urban dwelling animals call these trees home. However, in many communities, tree maintenance, replacement, and planting do not keep up with tree removal. Local governments' limited budgets and urban expansion work to decline the quality and quantity of the urban forest.

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