Of interest this week at Beal...

Tulip Tree
*Liriodendron tulipifera*

Family: the Magnolia family, Magnoliaceae
Also called Tulip Poplar, Yellow Poplar, and Whitewood

The genus *Liriodendron* is comprised of two, very similar but widely separated species; *Liriodendron tulipifera*, from Eastern North America, and *Liriodendron chinense*, of China. While the Magnoliaceae are no longer thought to represent the most primitive of flowering plants (Angiosperms), it is clear that the magnolias were successful before the last round of dinosaurs make their appearance and exit. While in some places this species is known by common names that include the word ‘poplar,’ their inclusion in the magnolia family means they are very distantly related to the true poplars (Genus *Populus* in the willow family; the Salicaceae). The tulip trees, *Liriodendron*, are unique amongst the family in having their anthers open facing away from the central axis of the flower (see top photo next page) instead of towards the center.

Tulip tree is the largest growing tree of the Southern deciduous forest, although its range extends north through Iowa, Michigan, and Ontario and south from Louisiana to Florida. It commonly attains a height of from 30 meters (100 feet) to approximately 60 meters (200 feet) while reaching more than 7 feet in diameter. Its straight growth habit, immense size, and tendency for its wood to be fine-grained and non-splitting make it a high-demand lumber product, although it is usually described as wood for non-decorative purposes, such as furniture structure, plywood, planking or pulp. In the past, its straight light trunk made it the bole of choice for dugout canoes. The light-colored wood is the basis of its common name ‘whitewood.’

Tulip tree foliage is one of the favored foods of the Tiger swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio glaucus*) and the sole known food for the larvae of the beautiful Tulip tree giant silk moth (*Callosamia angulifera*).

In the world of the First Nations, its bark was used to prepare a remedy for coughs and in combination with its seeds was used to expel intestinal worms. However, the
Up close, looking through the orange and green tepals, one can see that (unlike the rest of the Magnoliaceae) the (extrorse) anthers of *Liriodendron* open on the side facing away from the central axis.

Bark is a known source for the alkaloid tulipiferene and caution should be shown as it is known for its effects on the heart and nervous system. Its roots have been used to impart a lemon-like flavoring to spruce beer.

Even though this species does not transplant well after its first few years, it is a dynamic plant for large spaces, and its unique green and orange ‘tulip-like’ flowers are impressive, although sometimes located high above ground. It requires full sun and is discouraged in shady spots.