This year I am happy to report that the Leon County Adopt-a-Tree Program is planning to give eastern hop hornbeam trees. Another name commonly used for this tree is ironwood. If you have ever tried to chop or saw the wood of one of these trees it will feel like you are working with iron instead of wood. Regardless of which common name you use, this hard and densely wooded tree has only one scientific name: \( \text{(Ostrya virginiana)} \).

Eastern hop hornbeam is a native tree to our area and also occurs throughout most of the eastern half of the United States and some parts of southern Canada. Interestingly, it is also found in the mountains of Mexico, south to El Salvador and Honduras.

In our area, you will find eastern hop hornbeam growing naturally in shady, rich sites in the understory of hardwood forests. In yards this low maintenance and underutilized tree grows well in most rich but well-drained soils, in full sun to part shade.

Eastern hop hornbeam is a smaller tree, generally twenty-five to forty feet tall. It has a nice shape with a round crown spread of twenty to thirty feet. The finely-textured crown casts a medium or dense shade in full sun, but is more open in the shade, where it casts a light shadow. The bark is an attractive orange or grayish brown, peeling off in longitudinal strips.

Hophornbeam has a lovely yellow fall color, and the small nutlets, which ripen in summer and fall, are used by birds and mammals during the winter.
It is an excellent choice to use as a lawn tree, street tree or in a woodland garden. This size tree is very useful where you don’t have the space to grow one of our many larger shade trees.

Eastern hophornbeam has few insect and disease problems. The tree is very windfirm and resistant to breakage and thus is a good choice when considering hurricanes. It is an excellent substitute for the more commonly planted disease and damage prone Drake elm.

If you decide you want a eastern hophornbeam, the county will plant one tree per household. The tree must be placed between your house and the road, so that it will be visible to others. To let the county know that you want a tree, Leon County Right-of-Way Management Superintendent, Tom Jackson says to follow the instructions from the coupon in the County Link in the Tallahassee Democrat in December. Or go to the County's web site at www.leoncountyfl.gov, then to Adopt-A-Tree under "Spotlights" to request a tree on-line. Coupons are also available at the Leon County Public Works Center at 2280 Miccosukee Road. If you request a tree you will need to put a wooden stake where you want the tree placed. If there is no stake, the county planting crew will pick a good spot.

Remember to keep the tree well watered and mulched, especially in the beginning of its life. Water the tree by soaking the root ball three times per week unless we are receiving good rainfall.

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