

SEED BEARING PLANTS

Ginkgo

270 MYA – PRESENT

Ginkgo is commonly known as the Chinese maidenhair tree because its fan-shaped leaves resemble those of the maidenhair fern.

There is only one extant (living) species, *Ginkgo biloba* which only grows wild in a small area of central China.

Domain	Eukaryota
Kingdom	Plantae
Phylum	Ginkophyta
Class	Ginkopsida
Order	Ginkgoales
Family	Ginkgoaceae
Genus	Ginkgo
Species	<i>G biloba</i>

Fossil Record

The group of plants to which the modern ginkgo belongs (Ginkgoales) appear first in the fossil record from the Permian about 270 million years ago and were widespread during the Jurassic, 201–145 million years ago. With the evolution of flowering plants in the Cretaceous, ginkgos started to decline. By the Pliocene only one species remained, *Ginkgo biloba*, as such modern ginkgos are often referred to as living fossils. They are the sole surviving member of a once successful group and have changed very little in the last 150 million years.

Habitat and Lifestyle

During the Mesozoic, ginkgos formed part of rainforest flora. *Ginkgo biloba* normally grows as trees up to 25 m tall, but some individuals have been recorded as tall as 50 m. The tree is slow growing, and some are reported to be 2000 years old!

Fossilisation

Working out the relationships of fossil ginkgoales to the modern species is difficult because it is rare for the reproductive organs of the plant to be preserved. Ginkgo fossils are usually only the leaves.



Modern *Ginkgo biloba*.
Image from Fernando Losada Rodriguez,
Wikimedia Commons.



A deeply dissected leaf of *Ginkgoites australis*, early Cretaceous (about 125 million years old), Victoria. Image from James Field, Wikimedia Commons.

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DID YOU KNOW



At the end of World War II, an atomic bomb was dropped on the city Hiroshima, Japan. One of the buildings destroyed by the blast was a temple a little over a kilometre away from the centre of the blast. In the grounds of this temple there was a ginkgo tree, which, although badly damaged, survived. The tree has 'No more Hiroshimas' engraved on the trunk.