Tree Identification for Beginners

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Field Guides

Lots of options!

Handout of tree guide book covers
Using A Key
Using A Key

A KEY TO THE ELMS

1. Twigs smooth, not hairy- haired.

A. Bark of branches not corky-ridged. (with margins) (with margins) 

2. Bark of branches not corky- ridged.

A. Twigs hairy. (with margins) (with margins) 

B. Bark of branches corky. 

CORK ELK: BARK ELK: 

A KEY TO THE MAPLES

A. Leaves simple.

B. Stems of the lower part, smooth in May.

C. Flowers red; leaves pale brown, with dense triangular scales. 

D. Flowering by the leaf- edge, small, petal- like blooms. 

E. Flowers after the leaves open, small, petal- like blooms. 

C. Leaves flat; leaf- edge, finely toothed.

D. Flowering by the leaf- edge, small, petal- like blooms. 

E. Flowers after the leaves open, small, petal- like blooms. 

F. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, finely toothed. 

G. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

H. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

I. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

J. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

K. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

L. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

M. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

N. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

O. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

P. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

Q. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

R. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

S. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

T. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

U. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

V. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

W. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

X. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

Y. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed. 

Z. Leaves of the lower part, leaf- edge, slightly toothed.
Using A Key

### Key Based on Winter Characteristics

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   1a. Leaves deciduous. (11)

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3. Leaves with spiny-toothed margins .............AMERICAN HOLLY (*Ilex opaca*) 269
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4. Leaves 5 or more inches long; large terminal flower buds usually present ......
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6. Leaves in bundles of 2 to 5 .................................PINES (*Pinus*) 49
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Tree Identification for Beginners: Deciduous, Alternate
Northern Red Oak  
\textit{(Quercus rubra)}

- Large tree, can grow to over 100’ tall.
- Acorns provide food for wildlife.

Eastern White Oak  
\textit{(Quercus alba)}
Northern Red Oak
(*Quercus rubra*)

Common and widespread, grows mainly in uplands.

Eastern White Oak
(*Quercus alba*)

Common and widespread, grows in rich, moist soils.
Tree Identification for Beginners: Deciduous, Alternate

Northern Red Oak
(*Quercus rubra*)
- Twigs short and stout with clusters of buds at the tips.

Eastern White Oak
(*Quercus alba*)
- Twigs greenish to gray, with small, blunt buds growing in clusters at the twig tips.
Tree Identification for Beginners: Deciduous, Alternate

**Northern Red Oak (Quercus rubra)**
- Acorns 1”, have shallow, tightly scaled cups.

**Eastern White Oak (Quercus alba)**
- Acorns ¾””, cup is shallow and stalk is short. Often more slender in shape than red oak acorns.
Northern Red Oak
(Quercus rubra)

- Young bark greenish grey with narrow, vertical cracks.
- Older tree has smooth, flat, lighter ridges intersecting with rough furrows. (Looks like ski tracks.) ★
Eastern White Oak
(*Quercus alba*)

- Young bark light gray with thin, flaky vertical strips.
- ★ Older bark is light gray with irregular blocks.
American Beech
(*Fagus grandifolia*)

- Grows to 50 – 70’ tall and can grow to over 100’ tall.
- Common in well-drained uplands.
- Beechnuts can be an important food source for wildlife.
American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*)

- Twigs slender and have a zigzag shape with pointed buds.
- Often retains leaves through winter.
- Fruit ¾” and contains 1-3 small nuts.
American Beech  
(*Fagus grandifolia*)

- Bark smooth and light gray in young and old trees.
- Commonly afflicted with beech bark disease, which causes blisters, cankers and cracks to form on bark.
Black Cherry
(*Prunus serotina*)

- Grows to about 60’ tall.
- Common and widespread in woods and hedgerows.
- Fruit is an important food source for birds.
- Often infected with black knot disease.
Black Cherry
(*Prunus serotina*)

- Twigs slender and dark, with small dark buds.
- Fruit is small, less than ¼” and grow in dangling clusters.
Black Cherry  
(*Prunus serotina*)

- Young bark is smooth, reddish-brown with gray, horizontal lenticels.
- Older bark breaks into scales that curl outward and look like burned potato chips.
Tree Identification for Beginners: Deciduous, Alternate

Birch Bark Cheat Sheet

Gray birch

White birch

Black birch

Yellow birch
Gray Birch
(*Betula populifolia*)

- Small, slender tree; often grows with multiple trunks.
- Common pioneer species on disturbed soils.

Paper Birch
(*Betula papyrifera*)

- Slender tree, grows to about 70’ tall.
- Common in open woods or at wood edges.
Tree Identification for Beginners: Deciduous, Alternate

Gray Birch (*Betula populifolia*)
- Twigs slender and rough, with small buds.
- Male flower usually solitary at twig tips.

Paper Birch (White Birch) (*Betula papyrifera*)
- Twigs are stout for a birch, with buds relatively large.
Gray Birch (*Betula populifolia*)
- Seeds tiny and winged, in cones that persist on the twig into the winter.

Paper Birch (White Birch) (*Betula papyrifera*)
- Seeds borne in cone-like structures that develop from female catkins.
Gray Birch
(*Betula populifolia*)

- Trunks marked by dark ★ chevron at base of branches.
- Young bark reddish-brown with pale lenticels.
- Older bark grayish white, non-peeling.
Paper Birch (White Birch) 
(*Betula papyrifera*)

- Young bark reddish brown with pale horizontal lenticels.
- Older bark white and peeling, with thin, dark, horizontal lenticels.
- Outer layers of bark separate from trunk in curly strips.
Black Birch (Sweet Birch) *(Betula lenta)*

- Grows to about 60’ tall.
- Common in northern hardwood forests.
- Sap has a wintergreen smell and can be used to make birch beer.
Black Birch (Sweet Birch) 
(*Betula lenta*)

- Twigs dark gray-brown and glossy, buds hairless and pointed.
- Seeds borne in cone-like structures that develop from female catkins.
Black Birch *(Sweet Birch)* *(Betula lenta)*

- Young bark reddish-brown, with light colored horizontal lenticels.
- Older bark dark gray, broken into irregularly shaped plates that curl away from the trunk.
Tree Identification for Beginners: Deciduous, Alternate

Birch Bark Cheat Sheet

- Gray birch
- White birch
- Black birch
- Yellow birch
American Sycamore
(*Platanus occidentalis*)

- Large tree, can grow to over 100’ tall.
- Common in wet soils such as streambanks and bottomlands.
American Sycamore  
(*Platanus occidentalis*)

- Twigs are relatively slender, with a zigzag shape. Buds short and stout.
- Fruit contained in ball-shaped structure, which can persist on the tree into the winter.
American Sycamore
(*Platanus occidentalis*)

- Young bark green and brown, flakes off to reveal paler green or whitish bark beneath.
- Older bark becomes less scaly, is gray with narrow furrows broken into blocks.
- Topmost branches smooth and whitish.