

Pocket Reference for

Winter Tree Identification




If found please send to P.O. Box 1040, Mahomet, IL 61853 or
drop off at any of the Champaign County Forest Preserves.

Characteristics To Look For In Winter ID

- Bud arrangement
 - opposite (M.A.D. Horse Bucks)
 - Maples
 - Ashes
 - Dogwoods
 - Horse Chestnuts
 - Buckeyes
 - alternate (Others)
 - whorled (*Catalpa* sp.)
- Shape and color of buds
- Shape and color of leaf scars
- Color and structure of tree bark



General Notes

- Species with opposite arrangements are near the front of the reference, while species with alternate and whorled arrangements are near the back.
- Each species has the common name, genus and species, as well as the family name listed. Genus and species names are in italics and the family names all end in “AE.”
- A species marked with a  denotes a species that we would like to have a location reported, so we can collect seed when the time is right.

Lastly, this is by no means a complete guide to native trees in Illinois. It is simply a compilation of common trees that could be encountered during a hike in the woods. More trees will be added to this reference in the future so that a more complete guide can be generated

Thank You and Enjoy!





Maple

Aceraceae

Acer sp.

Box Elder

Acer negundo

Distinguishing features

- Buds are opposite.
- Twig color is red.
- White hairs are present on buds, creating a white “frost” on twig.





Maple

Aceraceae

Acer sp.

Sugar Maple

Acer saccharum

Distinguishing features

- Buds are opposite and pointed.
- Bud color is dark brown or shades of red.
- Twig color is light brown.
- Bark is gray in color, starting smooth and becoming more furrowed.





Silver Maple

Acer saccharinum

Distinguishing features

- Buds are opposite and pointed.
- Bud color is dark brown or shades of red.
- Twig color is light/medium brown.
- Bark is gray with shallow fissures and scaly appearance when mature.
- Twigs and buds have unpleasant odor when crushed or scratched.

Maple

Aceraceae

Acer sp.





Ohio Buckeye

Hippocastanaceae

Aesculus glabra.

Distinguishing features

- Bud color is light brown with opposite leaf scars.
- Terminal bud looks like cigar tip.
- Twig color is light gray/brown and is very thick.
- Bark is light gray developing to a scaly look at maturity.
- Bark feels spongy during warm months.





Blue Ash

Fraxinus quadrangulata

Distinguishing Features

- Twigs have opposite leaf scars.
- Twigs have “wings” that make it look square.
- Bark has diamond-shaped pattern.

Ashes

Oleaceae

Fraxinus sp.



**Terminal buds for all
Ashes look like a small
Hershey's Kiss.**



Ashes

Oleaceae
Fraxinus sp.



Green Ash

Fraxinus pennsylvanica

Distinguishing Features

- Tree has opposite leaf scars shaped like a “D.”
- Bark has diamond-shaped pattern.

White Ash

Fraxinus americana

Distinguishing Features

- Tree has opposite leaf scars shaped like a “C.”
- Bark has diamond-shaped pattern.



Hickories

Juglandaceae

Carya sp.

Bitternut Hickory

Carya cordiformis

Distinguishing Features

- Leaf scars are alternate.
- Buds are bright yellow.
- Bark is brown with shallow fissures. Bark is tight to trunk and does not have large shreddy scales at maturity.



Carya cordiformis bark.
(pictures from Virginia Tech)



Hickories

Juglandaceae

Carya sp.



Photo from Virginia Tech Website

Shellbark Hickory

Carya laciniosa

Distinguishing Features

- Leaf scars are alternate.
- Twigs have elongated dark brown buds with orange dots.
- Bark is “shaggy” with wide shreddy scales.

Shagbark Hickory

Carya ovata

Distinguishing Features

- Leaf scars are alternate.
- Buds are ovoid with many “layers.”
- Bark is “shaggy” with narrow shreddy scales.



Black Walnut

Juglandaceae

Juglans nigra

Distinguishing features

- Bark is chocolate brown with a double diamond pattern.
- Terminal bud is light brown with many tiny white hairs covering the surface.
- Bud scar is shaped like a monkey face.



Picture of monkey
face scar



Cottonwood

Salicaceae

Populus deltoides

Distinguishing features

- Twig has long pointed buds; up to 1/2”.
- Mature bark is deeply furrowed.
- Tree typically grows in moist soil.





Northern Red Oak

Quercus rubra

Distinguishing features

- Mature bark has vertical “ski tracks.”
- Buds appear very “knobby.”
- Bud color is typically a shiny reddish brown.

Oaks

Fagaceae

Quercus sp.





Oaks
Fagaceae
Quercus sp.

Black Oak

Quercus velutina

Distinguishing features

- Buds are alternate and often occur in groups of three.
- Terminal buds have tiny white hairs.
- Inner bark is yellow or orange colored when cut into.



Oaks

Fagaceae
Quercus sp.

Bur Oak

Quercus macrocarpa

Distinguishing features

- Buds are alternate and often occur in clusters at the tip.
- Buds are many shades of brown with very fine hairs.
- Bark and some branches are deeply furrowed.



Oaks

Fagaceae
Quercus sp.

Bristle tip

Shingle Oak

Quercus imbricaria

Distinguishing features

- Buds are alternate; terminal buds often occur in groups of three.
- Buds have a scaly appearance and are tan brown.
- Leaves of shingle oak usually remain on tree until late winter. Leaves are simple with a bristle tip.



Oaks

Fagaceae
Quercus sp.

White Oak

Quercus alba

Distinguishing features

- Buds are alternate and often occur in small clusters near the tip.
- Buds are rounded and light gray or brown in color.
- Leaves typically stay on twig for most of the winter.
- Leaves are simple, with rounded lobes and no bristle tips.





Honey Locust

Fabaceae

Gleditsia triacanthos

Distinguishing features

- Bark is often covered in many thorns and is a slate gray color.
- Twigs typically have a “zig-zag” shape.
- Thorns appear with points of three.
(Triacanthos = three spined)



Clusters of thorns on
main trunk

American Sycamore

Platanaceae

Platanus occidentalis



Distinguishing features

- Bark is gray/tan brown and patchy at base of tree, becoming almost entirely white near the top of the tree and along the branches.
- Buds are surrounded by leaf scars.
- Bud color is light brown.



Bark of American
Sycamore



American Bladdernut

Staphyleaceae

Staphylea trifolia

Distinguishing features

- It is a large shrub or small tree found in high quality bottomland areas.
- Seed pods stay on plant through most of winter.
- Each pod contains 2-5 seeds.



Seed pods of American
Bladdernut





American Hazelnut

Betulaceae
Corylus americana

Distinguishing features

- It is a large shrub or small tree which typically grows in clumps.
- Catkins (above) are present all winter.
- Seeds do not last long on tree because of wildlife.



American hazelnut seed
with shells





Coralberry

Caprifoliaceae

Symphoricarpos orbiculatus

Distinguishing features

- It is a small shrub, usually present in groups.
- Berries look like “Nerds” candy.
- It resembles honeysuckle in growth habits, but is native.



Berries in late fall





PawPaw

Annonaceae
Asimina triloba

Distinguishing features

- Leaf scars are alternate.
- Bark is thin and light brown.
- “Paint brush-like” tip extends up to 2/3”.
- Twig color is brown with bud being rusty brown with small hairs.





Sassafras

Lauraceae

Sassafras albidum

Distinguishing Features

- Leaf scars are alternate.
- Twig color is green.
- When scratched or cut, the bark and twig have a fruity smell.
- Mature bark is deeply furrowed





Musclewood

Betulaceae

Carpinus caroliniana

Distinguishing features

- It is a small tree found in moist woods.
- Bark is light gray and smooth with a “muscular” appearance.
- Bark typically has light colored striations.
- Twigs are very thin with very small buds which taper to a small point.



Striated, muscular bark





American Basswood
Tiliaceae
Tilia americana

Distinguishing features

- Bark is gray with small furrows.
- Tree typically occurs in clumps.
- Twigs are light brown with red-colored buds.
- Buds are edible, especially in early spring.



Basswood clump



Black Cherry

Rosaceae

Prunus serotina

Distinguishing features

- Bark is dark, nearly black with small chips/scales. It is very distinct.
- Tree typically occurs in shrubby areas with a crooked trunk.
- Twigs are dark gray/brown with small reddish brown buds.



Black Cherry bark



Hackberry

Ulmaceae

Celtis occidentalis

Distinguishing features

- Bark is gray and very “corky” looking.
- Leaf scars are alternate.
- Twigs are dark gray/brown with small red-dish-brown buds which are pointed and grow parallel to the twig.



Hackberry bark.
-Notice the corky appearance-



Sweetgum

Hamamelidaceae

Liquidambar styraciflua

Distinguishing features

- Leaf scars are alternate.
- Buds are shiny, light brown and green and come to a sharp, tapered point.
- Bark is gray with dark, outlined ridges.



Sweetgum bark



Eastern Redbud

Fabaceae

Cercis canadensis

Distinguishing features

- Leaf scars are alternate.
- Buds are round and dark brown.
- Twigs are dark brown, thin, and zigzag.
- Bark is reddish brown with thin shreddy scales.



Eastern redbud seed
pods



Bark of Coffeetree

Kentucky Coffeetree

Fabaceae
Gymnocladus dioicus

Distinguishing features

- Leaf scars are alternate and very large.
- Leaf scars resemble a shield, with three dots.
- Twigs are very thick and bare.
- Bark is gray with thin, sharp-looking ridges.



Coffeetree seed pods





Catalpa

Bignoniaceae

Catalpa sp.

Distinguishing features

- Leaf scars are whorled.
- Twigs are light gray and fairly thick.
- Seed pods are bean-like and remain on tree through winter.



Seeds pods on Catalpa.