

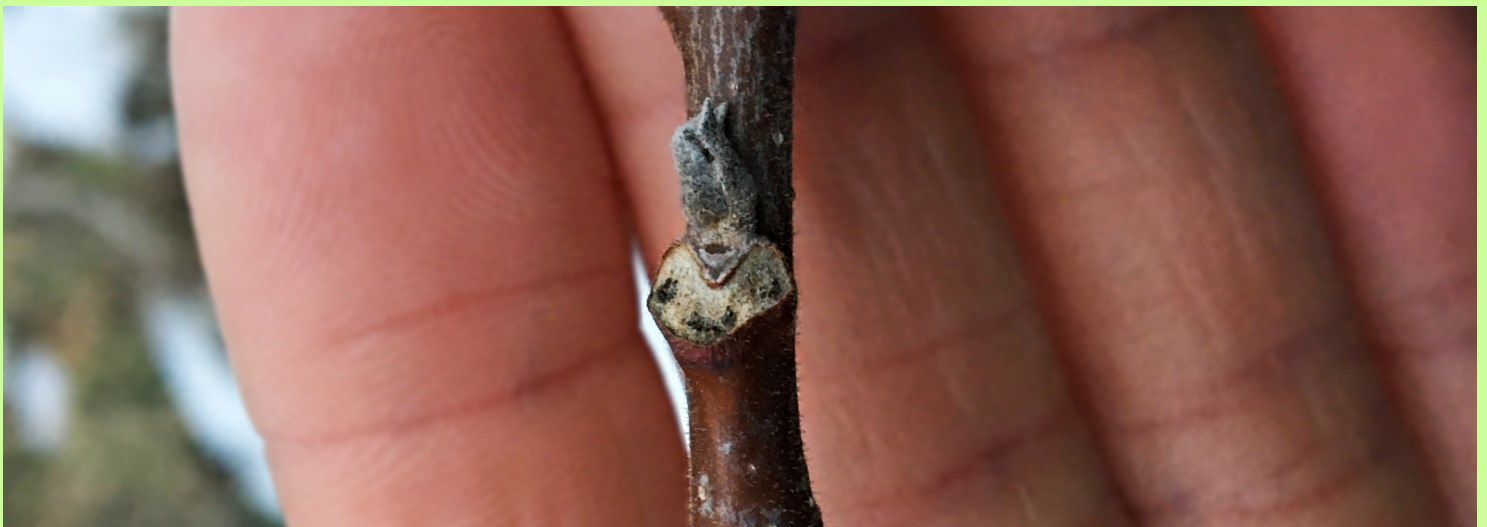
Winter Tree Identification

Today, we will be focusing on and noticing Trees, particularly deciduous trees (those whose leaves are shed in the fall) rather than coniferous (trees which bear cones and most often keep their foliage all year long). There are many various clues that we can look for on and around these slumbering giants, which will help us to determine who exactly they are, even if their leaves have all fallen and since become obscured in snow.

Let's begin with what is missing – the Leaves...

The first thing we can take a quick look for is to see if any leaves have indeed held on to the branches, or if there may be some in good condition yet that have gathered below at the base of the tree. If we find any leaves here, we can use a [Tree Field Guide](#) or [Plant Identification App](#) to get some initial suggestions as to who we may be looking at.

On every branch that has lost a leaf to the natural process of autumn, there will remain a mark called a “leaf scar.” This small mark remains on the branch or twig where the leaf used to be attached at its petiole (base of its stem). Some trees, such as the Black Walnut, have very distinctive (and adorable!) leaf scars. Does anyone else see a monkey face here?



Next up - the Bark...



Anybody feeling hungry? The bark of the Black Cherry Tree is often described as looking similar to “burnt Cornflakes cereal.”

The bark of every tree serves as a protective layer from elements, bacterial and fungal infection, predators and other invaders. It can also serve to aid us in identifying tree species in the winter when the leaves are missing or too deteriorated.

Get up close to the bark, and take a gentle feel. Is it smooth? Rough? Bumpy? Does it have any extra interesting features? What scent does it have, if any? Is it curious itself and looking back at you?



And what about the Branches? They're always around, too!

Buds will form on all healthy deciduous trees, awaiting the arrival of spring when they will swell with growth and burst forth new, fresh leaves to collect energy from the sun.

Not only will these buds be essential for the trees to begin their cycles anew, but they can also help us to learn more about who the trees we meet might be, even in the coldest months of the winter!

Colour, shape and size can all be important features to note about the buds you might find, but one of the first and most telling aspects can be where and how they form on the twigs or branches...

There are two very common and distinctive orientations for buds:

Opposite

and

Alternate



There are far less trees with opposite arrangement rather than alternate, and the following acronym can help for remembering some of the more commonly found trees whose buds will be arranged oppositely...

M(able)
A(sh)
D(ogwood)

Notice how the buds on the Sugar Maple form at the same place on opposite sides of the branch?

While the buds on the American Basswood twigs form alone as singles, in separate spots along the branch



And All the Other Little Details, Such As...

Catkins



The Winter Catkins of Ironwood

Catkins (cylindrical flower clusters) develop on some species in Southern Ontario, including but not limited to Paper Birch, Ironwood and Willows.

Seeds



Keys/Seeds of Sugar Maple

Even trees who have let go of all of their leaves may have “keys” or seeds (the reproductive parts of the trees) remaining on their branches.

Nuts



Hollow Nut from Rare Butternut

Most nuts will have fallen and become snow-covered, but with some gentle digging, can sometimes still be found under certain species like Butternut.

When meeting a tree on a walk around your neighbourhood or on a trail, take some time to get up close and personal to get to know it better! Taking a look at and noting these details, and comparing with a field guide or other illustrated/photographic resources, you may soon be able to identify the Trees around you, even in the Winter!