



Dufferin County Forest Basic Tree Identification Dufferin County and Area



Generally speaking, the easiest way to identify most trees is to look at the leaves or needles, but there are other clues: bark, buds, seeds, and wood.

1. Is the tree **coniferous** or **deciduous**?

Coniferous **(softwood, conifer)**

needle or scale-like leaves
seeds in cones
most lose their leaves (needles) gradually

Deciduous **(hardwood)**

broad leaves
seeds not in cones
lose all their leaves at the same time

If the tree is coniferous, go to #2.

If the tree is deciduous, go to the next page.

2. Are the leaves needles or scale-like?

If the leaves are scale-like, the tree is probably a kind of cedar. The most common type of cedar in this area is the **eastern white cedar**.

If the leaves are needles, go to #3.

3. Are the needles attached to the branch in bundles, tufts, or by themselves?

If the needles are short and are attached in tufts of ten or more, the tree is one of the larches. The most common larch in this area is **tamarack**. Tamarack is the only coniferous tree in Canada that loses all of its leaves (needles) at one time, just like a deciduous tree.

If the needles are in bundles, they are in bundles of two, three, or five.

Some trees that have needles in **bundles of two** are:

red pine (tall, straight, "telephone pole" tree with reddish, scaly bark)

Scots (Scotch) pine (shorter needles than red pine, bark near the crown is orange, usually very twisted)

jack pine (cones remain on the tree and remain closed until subjected to high heat, grows mostly in the boreal forest)

lodgepole pine (grows mostly in western Canada)

Some trees that have needles in **bundles of three** are:

pitch pine (grows mostly in the northeastern U.S.A.)

ponderosa pine (grows mostly in western Canada)

Some trees that have needles in **bundles of five** are:

- eastern white pine** (Ontario's provincial tree)
- western white pine** (grows mostly in western Canada)
- whitebark pine** (grows mostly in western Canada)
- limber pine** (grows mostly in western Canada)
- bristlecone pine** (grows mostly in western Canada)

4. Are the needles flat or four-sided?

If the needles are flat (and the branches have a flat appearance), the tree is either a fir or a hemlock. The most common trees from these groups that grow in this area are **balsam fir** and **eastern hemlock**.

If the needles are four-sided (and the branches have a rounded appearance), the tree is a kind of spruce:

- white spruce**
- Norway spruce** (branches droop low to the ground, is not native to Canada)
- black spruce** (grows mostly in the boreal forest)
- red spruce** (grows mostly in eastern Canada)

If the tree is deciduous, start here.

1. Are the leaves and branches growing opposite to each other on the tree?

If no, go to #2. These are the "alternate" species.

If yes, then the tree must be a maple, ash, horsechestnut, dogwood (usually shrubs) or one of the caprifoliaceae family.

The most common types of maples in this area are:

- sugar maple** (the traditional maple leaf, leaves have smooth lobes, appears on Canada's flag)
- red maple** (leaves are toothed, flowers and leaf stalks are red, leaves turn bright red in the fall)
- silver maple** (leaves are "cut" much deeper than sugar maple, bark is flakier)
- Manitoba maple** (often grows as a shrub, leaves are compound and don't have a "maple" shape)

The most common types of ashes in this area are:

- white ash**
- black ash**
- green ash**

The ashes look very similar, and are difficult to tell apart even if you're an expert.

Horsechestnut is a common landscape tree, but does not generally grow in the wild in this area.

Dogwoods usually grow as large shrubs, not trees. There are two main species in this area:

- red osier dogwood** (branches are bright red in colour, grows in wet areas)
- alternate-leaf dogwood** (leaves are usually alternate)

The family caprifoliaceae has numerous members that usually grow as large shrubs. Some examples are:

eastern red elderberry
nannyberry

highbush cranberry
lilac

2. Are the leaves compound or simple?

Compound leaves have more than one leaflet or leaf blade on a stalk.

Simple leaves have only one leaf blade on a stalk.

The most common trees in this area with alternate compound leaves are:

black walnut, butternut, hickory, and other species of nut trees

black locust (usually grows as a large shrub)

European mountain ash (rarely grows in the wild in this area)

If the leaves are simple, go to #3.

3. Are the leaves lobed, toothed, or smooth?

The most common types of trees in this area with **lobed** leaves are:

white oak (ends of lobes are rounded)

red oak (ends of lobes are pointed)

mulberry (rarely grows in the wild in this area)

The most common types of trees in this area with **toothed** leaves are:

American beech (smooth, grey, "elephant leg" bark)

American chestnut

basswood (large, heart-shaped leaves)

white birch (white, paper-like bark)

yellow birch (bronze or yellow-coloured, paper-like bark)

speckled alder

ironwood (bark in narrow strips naturally peeling off tree)

willow (narrow, long leaves, usually grows in wetter areas)

balsam poplar

trembling aspen

largetooth aspen

American elm

wild crab apple

black cherry (bark has the appearance of "burnt cornflakes")

The most common type of tree in this area with **smooth** leaves is **Russian olive**, which is not a native species and rarely grows in the wild. Many of the species with smooth leaves (such as pawpaw, redbud, cucumber-tree, and magnolia) grow in the wild only further to the south in the Deciduous (Carolinian) Forest.