



Common Tree Identification

This video will introduce you to some of Pennsylvania's common tree species as we explore the trails around the Beaver County Conservation District and wetlands.

1. First on our list is **Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)**, a tree with alternating, compound leaves. The 10 to 24 leaflets per leaf are around 3 inches long, pointed, and have a fine-toothed edge. Black walnuts have rough, furrowed bark and produce large nuts eaten by many wildlife species. This tree is also valuable for its wood used in building furniture, paneling, and other products.
2. Second on our list is **honey locust (*Gleditsia spp.*)**. It's alternating, compound leaves have 15 to 30 rounded leaflets. Wildlife are fond of its leathery seed pods which grow and ripen in late summer. Many honey locusts have sharp thorns, but humans have created thornless varieties used as decorative plants along town and city streets.
3. Third on our list of compound-leafed trees is **staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*)**. This tree gets its name from the fuzzy coating on its upper branches which looks similar to the velvet on a buck's growing antlers. The leaflets on sumac leaves can be up to 5 inches long and have a finely-toothed or serrated edge. Staghorn seeds grow in an upright cluster called a drupe which turns red in late summer. This species has little value to people or wildlife.
4. **Pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*)** is another compound-leafed tree with nuts valuable to wildlife. Its leaves have five to seven large leaflets, and its rough bark is ridged rather than furrowed. Hickory trees are not only valuable to wildlife but also are a prized timber tree, producing lumber used in furniture, tool handles, and baseball bats.
5. **Boxelder or ash-leafed maple (*Acer negundo*)** also has compound leaves which may resemble poison ivy. Unlike our previous species, boxelder has leaves which grow in pairs along its twigs. This growing pattern is known as opposite rather than alternate. Boxelders produce winged samaras, also known as maple keys, whirly-gigs, or helicopters. These seeds are eaten by many animals in the spring and early summer.

6. One of our more common maples in Pennsylvania is the **red maple (*Acer rubrum*)**, identified by their three-lobed, pointed leaves which look similar to a goose's foot. Red maples, along with our other maple species also have opposite leaf patterns, with leaves growing in pairs along its twigs. Young red maples have smooth, greyish bark which cracks and splits as the trees grow older. Red maples will grow in both wetlands and in drier upland forests.
7. Our next species is the **silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*)**. These trees also have bark which splits as it grows older. Silver maples prefer growing in wetlands. They can be distinguished from red maples by their sharply-pointed leaves with deep gaps between the lobes. Silver maples get their name from the silvery color on the bottom of their leaves.
8. The final maple we'll talk about today is the **sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*)**. This is the common maple used in the production of maple syrup by collecting and boiling down its sap. Sugar maples have the standard-shaped maple leaf with five, pointed lobes and smooth edges between the points. The bark of these trees also cracks as it grows up, but sugar maple bark will often imitate other tree species. Along with our other maples, sugar maple seeds are a prized food source for wildlife and a popular lumber tree used in making furniture and wood paneling.
9. A tree species often mistaken for a maple is the **American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)**. These trees have large, alternating leaves and produce seed balls rather than samaras. Sycamore seeds often remain on the branches over winter and are dispersed by spring storms. These trees have unique bark which flakes off to reveal pale, almost-white inner bark on the upper trunk and branches. Sycamores commonly grow along streams, rivers, and lakes, and their roots help protect streambanks by holding soil in place during floods.
10. Another common tree around our wetlands is the **black willow (*Salix nigra*)**. Older trees have shaggy bark, but younger willows are smooth and slender, growing in clumps. Willow leaves are long and lance-like with serrated edges. They bloom in early spring, and by early summer, willow flowers grow fluff which helps spread their seeds in the wind.
11. **Black cherry (*Prunus serotina*)** is an upland species with similar lance-like leaves as black willows, but its leaves are much wider. Black cherry is an important lumber tree; its reddish wood is often used in creating beautiful furniture, wood paneling, and decorative pieces. Black cherries have unique bark, flaky and dark grey in color, and often said to resemble burnt cornflakes.
12. Another upland tree with unique bark is the **American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*)**. This tree has smooth, pale-grey bark which is a common target of vandals where older beech trees grow close to trails. They have simple, pointed, oval leaves with a toothed edge and

grow long, thin buds. Young beech trees often sprout from the roots of older trees rather than growing from seeds.

13. Another tree with simple, toothed leaves is the **American Elm (*Ulmus americana*)**. Elm leaves, however, are more rounded than beech leaves. The bark of American elm appears as flat-topped ridges with diamond-shaped furrows in between. This bark feels like a hard sponge, giving way slightly when pressure is applied to it.
14. Another tree with ridged bark is the **chestnut oak (*Quercus montana*)**. It's bark looks like an alligator's back as the tree grows older. Chestnut oaks have large, long, oval leaves, pointed at the end, but with rounded teeth along the edge.
15. **Northern red oaks (*Quercus rubra*)** are another common upland oak. Its bark is often described as looking like ski tracks due to its smooth ridges. Red oak leaves are broad and have pointed lobes, a standard oak leaf. Both red and chestnut oaks are a valuable food and shelter tree for wildlife and produce high-quality wood for building and making furniture.
16. The final oak we'll cover today is the **pin oak (*Quercus palustris*)**. They have smaller, dark-green leaves with five, pointed lobes. They prefer growing near wetlands compared to other oak species. The bottom branches of pin oaks typically point downwards and die off as the tree ages. This gives pin oaks a distinct, full silhouette when viewed from a distance.
17. Moving back to the uplands, we come across another tree with unique leaves. This is **sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)**. Its leaves come in 3 different shapes, typically referred to as the trident, the oval, and the mitten. Sassafras has a fragrant odor when the leaves are crushed, and its inner bark is orange in color. Sassafras twigs and leaves are eaten by many animals, and it has historically been used to make tea or provide scent for soaps.
18. **Silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*)** is a common small tree around our wetlands. It has opposite-arranged leaves along its twigs, and the veining in its simple, oval leaves also grows in pairs. The twigs of silky dogwood turn red, and it produces clusters of tiny, white flowers. Dogwoods are an important species for protecting streambanks from flood damage.
19. **Speckled alder (*Alnus incana*)** is another small, wetland tree. It has rough, rounded leaves and grows both catkins which produce pollen in spring and small cones where its seeds develop.
20. A shrub with leaves which may look like an alder's at first glance is the **hawthorn (*Crataegus spp.*)**. Hawthorn leaves come in a variety of shapes but all have toothed edges. Hawthorn can be identified by its long, needle-like thorns. These thorns made it a useful, natural fence for corralling livestock over in Europe, and several species were imported during colonization of the US.

21. To round off our tree exploration, we'll cover two of our evergreens. First is the **eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*)**. It can be identified by its long, soft needles which grow in clumps of five. Needles on the lower branches of wild white pine die and fall to the ground when they no longer get enough sunlight.
22. And our final tree today is the **eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*)**, Pennsylvania's state tree. Hemlocks have short, rounded needles with a pale underside and dark green top. These dense needles provide important habitat for many songbirds which nest in hemlock branches. The cones of hemlocks are tiny and can often be seen growing at the ends of its branches and littering the ground beneath these trees.

Thank you for joining us on this exploration of common trees around the Conservation District's property.