

A Guide to Deciduous Tree Knowledge

F-436, (Revised) January 1997, Reviewed and reprinted May 1998

Ronald C. Smith, Extension Horticulturist and Turfgrass Specialist

Dale E. Herman, Professor, Department of Plant Sciences

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The names of trees, as those of friends, should be learned and used when you talk about them. Names are convenient handles by which we designate a particular object. Until we know the names of trees, our interest and appreciation for these beautiful and majestic plants is truly hampered. The information here is designed to help you learn to identify "your trees."

What's in a name? Trees have names much like we humans do – that is, in a binomial form. Like the last names of the authors – Smith and Herman – one doesn't know which Smith or Herman is being referred to until the specific epithet, that is our first names, are applied. Trees have common and scientific names. Names like oak, maple, and walnut are the common names for the genera *Quercus*, *Acer*, and *Juglans*, respectively. The advantage of scientific names is their standardization. In other words, anywhere one goes in the world, they would be the same. This is not true with common names, in spite of efforts to standardize them. If you choose to use only common names, be sure that the listener has the same understanding of the name that you do.

This circular is not meant to be complete, just to stimulate interest in learning some of the more common deciduous trees found in our region. It is intended to aid in the fundamentals of identification and increase your appreciation of the beautiful trees that so richly enhance our lives.

Deciduous Trees Are Divided Into Four Large Groups Based on Leaf Type and Arrangement



A. Simple leaves located opposite each other on the twig, e.g., maples and tree lilacs.



B. Simple leaves located alternately on the twig, e.g., birch, poplars and willows.



C. Compound leaves located opposite each other on the twig, e.g., ash and buckeye.



D. Compound leaves located alternately on the twig, e.g., locusts and walnut.

At the base of a mature leaf you will find a bud, while at the base of a leaflet of a compound leaf, there are no buds. (Refer to the drawing of a compound leaf.) Leaf margins often are helpful in identifying trees. These margins take various shapes.



Smooth, Entire



Finely toothed



Doubly toothed, sharp pointed



Lobed

[[NEXT](#)]

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North Dakota State University Agriculture and University Extension
Dept. 7070, Morrill 7, P.O. Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050