

Leaf ID cheat sheet: four clues and the tricky twins

Three pages from the Sagestead Tree & Leaf ID Pack: the four clues that sort almost every tree, and how to tell sugar maple from red maple and white oak from red oak. Clip them to a board and go outside.

How to use it

- 1 Print pages 2 to 4 at 100% (Actual size). Cardstock lasts longer outdoors.
- 2 Pages 2 and 3: pick up a fallen leaf and check the four clues: simple or compound, pairs or staggered, the edge, the veins.
- 3 Page 4: found a maple or an oak? Look at the gaps, the teeth and the tips to name it.
- 4 Look at several leaves and at the twig, not just one leaf. Snap a photo of the whole tree and its bark.

Safety first

- Leaves of three, let it be: never touch a three-leaflet plant until a grown-up checks. It could be poison ivy or poison oak.
- Look, don't taste. Buckeye nuts are poisonous; walnut husks stain and ginkgo seed pulp can irritate skin.
- After walks in woods or tall grass, check for ticks, and wash hands when you get home.

Want the whole pack?

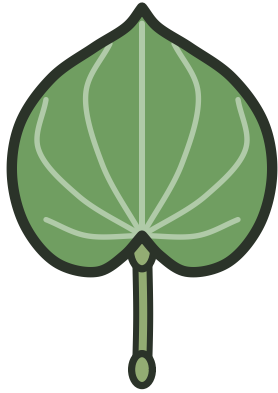
The full Tree & Leaf ID Pack has 24 field guide pages with true-size leaf rulers, a yes/no Leaf Key, 24 ID cards, a Fall Color Chart, leaf bingo, riddles, a quiz and Adopt a Tree, in US Letter and A4.

Find it on Etsy: search "Sagestead Tree & Leaf ID Pack"

Leaf Words: Leaf & Twig

Two questions that sort almost every tree.

Simple or compound?



SIMPLE

one blade on its stem



COMPOUND (feather)

leaflets along a stalk



COMPOUND (hand)

leaflets from one point

In pairs or staggered?



OPPOSITE

leaves in pairs



ALTERNATE

one leaf at a time

Remember MAD Horse:

Maple, Ash, Dogwood and Horse chestnut (buckeyes) grow their leaves in pairs (almost always).

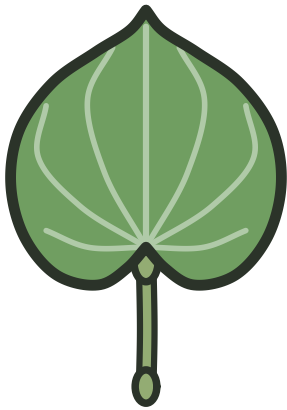
Most other trees you'll meet, like oaks, sycamore, sweetgum and tuliptree, are alternate.

Check the twig, not the leaflets: a compound leaf's leaflets can pair up on any tree.

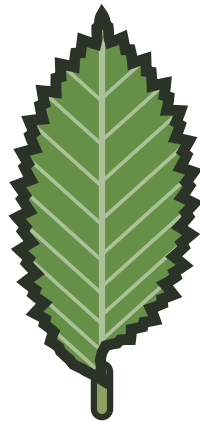
Leaf Words: Edge & Veins

Look closely: the edge and the veins tell a lot.

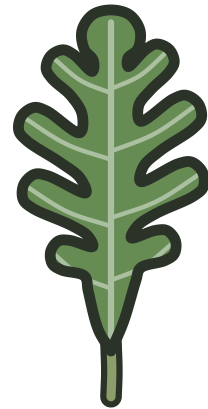
What does the edge look like?



SMOOTH
no teeth at all

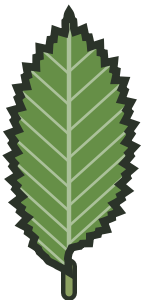


TOOTHED
like a saw

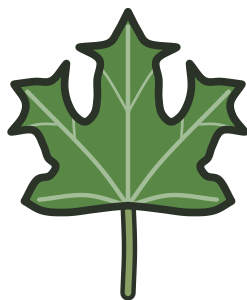


LOBED
big bumps or points

Which way do the veins go?



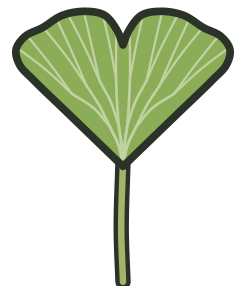
FEATHER
from a middle vein



HAND
from one point



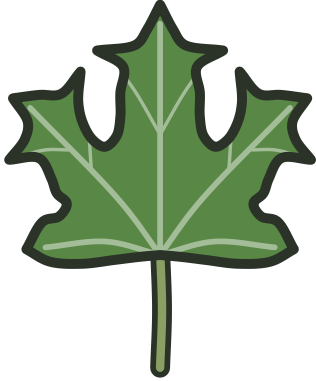
RAINBOW
curving to the tip



FAN
no middle vein

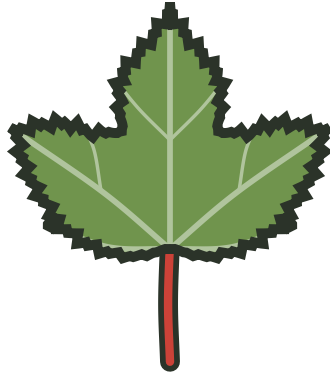
Tricky Twins: Maples & Oaks

Look at the gaps, the teeth and the tips.



Sugar maple

round U-shaped gaps
no fine teeth



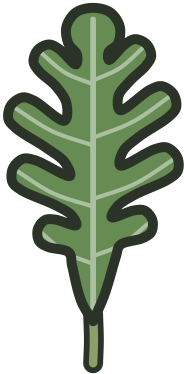
Red maple

sharp V-shaped gaps
sawtooth edge, red stem



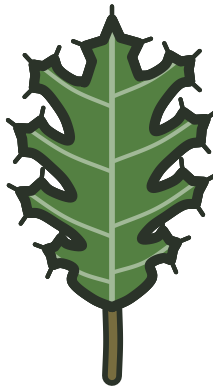
Silver maple

very deep cuts
silvery-white underside



White oak

rounded lobes
no bristle tips



Red oak

pointed lobes
tiny bristle on each tip



Live oak

no lobes at all!
look for acorns

Street-tree alert: Norway maple looks like sugar maple, but its leaf is wider than long and a snapped leaf stem oozes milky sap.