
Arbor Day

Arbor Day is a celebration of trees, those majestic plants that together make us forests, clean our air, give us paper and wood, and stand tall in rain or shine. Countries around the world use the holiday to teach environmental conservation and forestry and encourage tree planting. This discussion will focus on the history of this annual holiday and engage in some fun facts regarding this botanical celebration.

The History of Arbor Day

Arbor Day is a holiday dedicated to trees that is celebrated in many countries around the world. Trees are a vital part of the world's ecosystem and are hugely important to human life in particular. This holiday serves as a way to both honor the humble and mighty tree and to help replenish the world's supply by planting them.

The dates of Arbor Day festivities are often in the spring but vary worldwide according to many factors, including when the local conditions are ideal for tree planting. In the United States, Arbor Day is celebrated annually on the last Friday in April. Canada celebrates Arbor Day on the last Wednesday in September. In Japan, the holiday is called Greenery Day and is held on May 4 each year.

The first known tree holiday goes back hundreds of years. It took place in Spain in the village of Mondoñedo in 1594. The site is known as Alameda de los Remedios and is still home to lime and horse-chestnut trees.

The first Arbor Day in America was held in Nebraska City, Nebraska, on April 10, 1872. An impressive one million trees were put in the ground. The event was organized by newspaperman Julius Sterling Morton, who also served as Secretary of Agriculture under President Grover Cleveland.

Birdsey Grant Northrop, of Kent, Connecticut, is credited with popularizing the concept of arbor festivals throughout America and worldwide. The educator, preacher, farmer, city planner, lecturer, writer, and diplomat came to be known internationally as the "Father of Arbor Day." Northrop traveled the world extolling the importance of protecting nature, planting trees, and cultivating "tree culture," which includes planting shade trees along sidewalks and in parks. In his travels, he also recommended instituting Arbor Day celebrations.

In 1876, he suggested planting trees to honor the centennial of American Independence and the sacrifice of those who fought for freedom. Connecticut was the first state to encourage its citizens to take part in this cause, offering prizes to people who planted five or more trees. Soon, other states joined in this yearly activity. Northrop's message was also embraced in many other countries, including Japan, Canada, Australia, and Europe.

In Canada, the holiday was instituted by Sir George Ross while he was Ontario's minister of education. (He later served as premier of Ontario.) He started the festivities to inspire students to take an active role in maintaining and improving school grounds, including by planting trees.

In 1907, after encouragement from conservationist Major Israel McCreight and Gifford Pinchot, who headed up the United States Forest Service, President Theodore Roosevelt established a National Arbor Day to encourage the appreciation of trees and the teaching of forestry in schools.



Today, Arbor Day celebrations continue the tradition of planting and tending to trees as well as simply appreciating them. This holiday is celebrated in many unique ways by people from all walks of life. In addition to planting trees, celebrants may trim, mulch, or water them, or just walk among them. Others might take photographs or paint pictures of them or picnic under them. Teachers often use the occasion to educate their students about the biology of trees as well as the role trees play in our lives.

Fast Facts

- According to Botanical Gardens Conservation International, there are 60,065 different species of trees.
- India's Arbor Day, which began in 1950, is celebrated in July as an annual festival where millions of trees are planted.
- It's estimated that the world is home to hundreds of billions of trees.
- In Kenya, palm and coconut trees are planted every April 21 on National Tree Planting Day.
- Generally, trees are divided into two types: coniferous and deciduous.
- Iran's tree holiday is usually held on March 5 and includes the sharing of saplings among people across the country as well as tutorials on planting.
- The country of Qatar is rich in oil, but its desert climate does have a serious downside—no trees.
- Mongolia first began celebrating Arbor Day in 2010.
- The countries with the most trees are as follows (in order): Russia, Canada, Brazil, and the United States.
- In South Korea, Arbor Day was discontinued as a public holiday in 2005. However, citizens continue to take part in yearly tree-planting festivities.
- Neither banana trees nor bamboo trees are actually trees. Banana plants are an herb with a succulent stem that's related to ginger. Bamboo is actually a grass.
- In Israel, the holiday is celebrated during Tu Bishvat, which is also known as "the new year for trees." The celebration typically falls in January or February and involves planting trees or raising money for conservation or reforestation efforts.
- The rarest tree in the world is New Zealand's *Pennantia baylisiana*. There is only one left growing in the wild. New Zealand first celebrated Arbor Day in 1890. Today, it takes place on June 5, fittingly overlapping with World Environmental Day.



Meet Your Local Trees

Learn about some common North American trees and gather resources about trees in your area. Take a walk around your neighbourhood to explore and identify trees, and then collect your findings in a scrap book!

Introduction

Do you know what trees are on your block? What are the most common trees in your province or state? If you don't know the answers to these questions, don't feel bad. Most people don't. Being able to identify trees makes walks and scenic drives more interesting. People who feel connected to nature also tend to feel a greater sense of well-being.



Common Trees

At last count, the forest service estimated that the United States is home to about 865 species of native or naturalized trees. Of course, there are also exotic trees and outliers that have been planted, too. Canada is home to a huge number of spruce trees, while the red maple is the most common tree in the U.S. Other easy-to-find North American trees include lodgepole and loblolly pines, dogwoods, sweetgums, and Douglas firs.

Heritage Trees

Many states have heritage tree programs. Heritage trees are special in some way—they may be extremely large, old, or rare. Other times, they have some special historical significance or aesthetic value. The first state-sponsored heritage tree project began in 1995 in Oregon. Every year, Oregonians nominate trees for consideration. Plaques are hung on heritage trees, and there are special ordinances put in place for their care. (If a heritage tree is on private property, the owner must agree to accept the designation since there are responsibilities that come with it.) Following Oregon's lead, other states and regions have set up heritage tree programs. You can look online to see if your area has a heritage tree program. Usually, a map and guide to the heritage trees is available so you can plan an outing to visit some of them.

Famous Trees

Perhaps you're lucky enough to live near a famous tree you can visit. In Massachusetts, for example, the "Endicott" pear tree was planted in the 1630s and still bears fruit today. Another well-known tree is "General Sherman," a 2,000-plus-year-old California giant sequoia that is about 275 feet tall.

Preparations for a Tree Tour

- Make copies of the Tree Notes sheet located at the end of this document. You may want to put the sheets on clipboards with pens or pencils attached so they are ready to use.



- Print the pictorial guide of Common Tree Leaves.
- Contact local arboretums, forest service departments, or heritage tree programs to find out about local trees. They may also have tree maps and brochures to download or receive in the mail. Other good resources are local colleges and universities, which often provide markers identifying campus trees.
- The Arbor Day Foundation sells tree identification guides and offers free online tree identification.
- Download an app that can help you identify trees, such as the California Academy of Science's website and application iNaturalist.
- Check out library books about trees and tree identification or borrow *The Tree Key* from the Open Library.

Take a Tree Tour

Take a neighborhood walk and stop to notice the different trees. Bring some plastic sandwich bags to collect leaves, needles, and cones. Participants can use the Tree Notes to write and sketch observations. Take photos with a camera or cell phone.

Make a Tree Binder

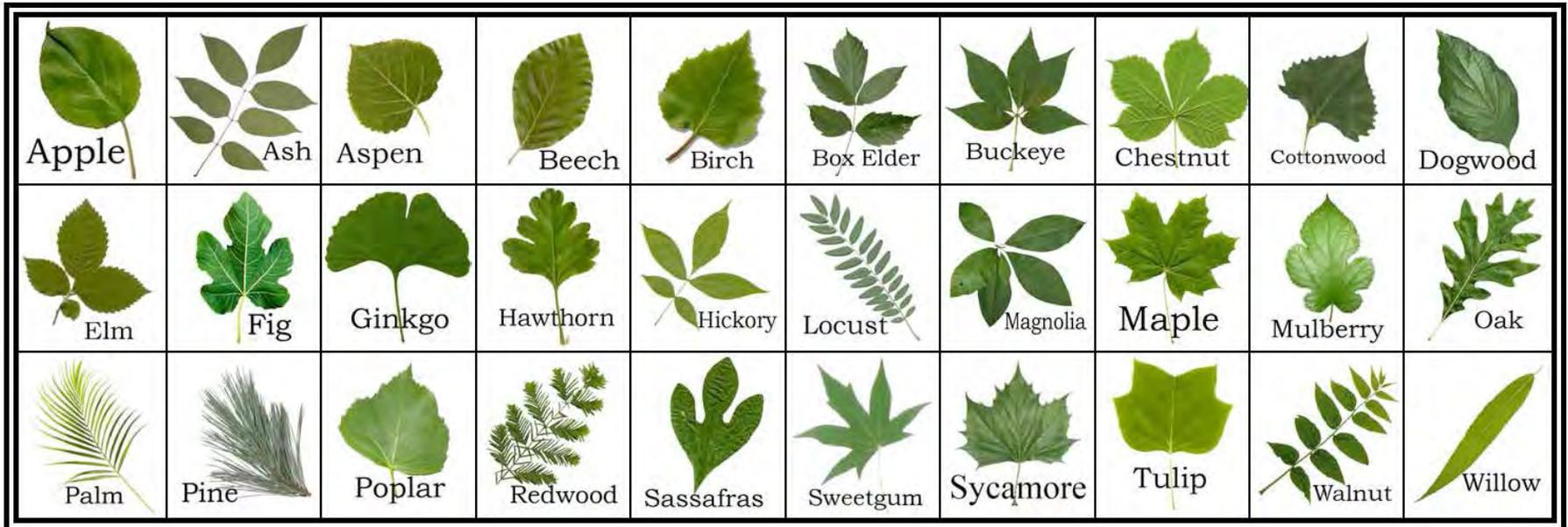
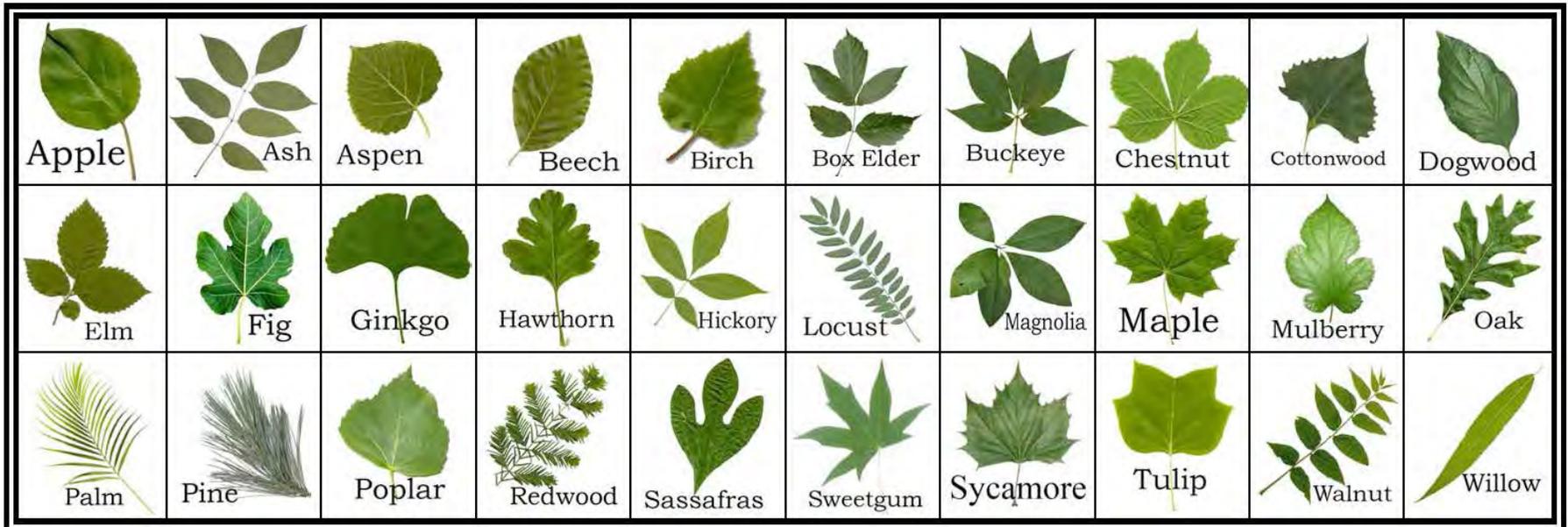
Supplies:

- Collected leaves
- Three-ring binder
- Plastic page protectors
- Wax paper
- Heavy books for leaf pressing
- (Optional) Iron and rag

Steps:

1. After you return from your tree outing, work on identifying any unknown trees using apps, online guides, or print resources. Add what you learn to the Tree Notes.
2. Place the Tree Notes in plastic page protectors and put them in a binder.
3. Press any leaves that were collected by sandwiching them with wax paper and covering them with a heavy book overnight.
4. (Optional) Keep the leaves in the wax paper, place a rag over them, and iron them (without steam) until the wax paper melts.
5. Put flattened or ironed leaves in a page protector and add them to the binder.
6. Make it a habit to notice trees on outings and continue working on your tree binder. This is a great way to pass time on longer drives or spark conversation on walks.

Common Tree Leaves



Tree Notes

Name/Type of Tree (if known)

Description

Location

Sketch of Leaf,
Needles, Cones, etc.

Name/Type of Tree (if known)

Description

Location

Sketch of Leaf,
Needles, Cones, etc.

Name/Type of Tree (if known)

Description

Location

Sketch of Leaf,
Needles, Cones, etc.