

Leaves and Needles

Every one of these leaves or needles represents a tree found in the United States today. While they appear to be widely different in shape and size, each one does the job of making food for its tree. All in all, they are a very useful and beautiful topping to our majestic forests.



A Glossary of Leafy Splendor

Key:

Alternate: one leaf attached at each node of the twig.

Opposite: two leaves attached at each node on opposite sides of the twig.

American Basswood leaves are not only edible but downright tasty! They are heart-shaped, fine-toothed, and hairless, measuring 5"-6" long.

American Elm's oval leaves are glossy, dark green on top, pale and downy underneath. They taper towards the tip with double-toothed edges.

American Holly leaves are dark green and shiny above, pale green below. They're elliptical, evergreen - with very sharp spines!

American Hornbeam has shiny, dark green, fine textured foliage. Fall colors in this broadleaf range from yellow or apricot to orange-red and plum.

American Sycamore is our country's largest broadleaf tree and a popular shade tree because of its wide, dense crown.

Bald Cypress is not really a cypress but a conifer that thinks it's deciduous! (*Hence the name "bald."*) one of only two species native to North America.

Balsam Fir needles are flat, resinous, and short. This evergreen conifer reaches a maximum age of about 200 years.

Balsam Poplar leaves are thick, wedged-shaped, shiny, dark green with a distinct fragrance.

Beech leaves are small but still cast some of the darkest shade in the forest. They turn yellow in the fall, have no lobes, and are arranged alternately along the twig.

Black Cherry leaves are alternate, leathery and contain small amounts of cyanide that are released when the leaves are damaged.

Black Locust leaves are oval, entire leaflets. They alternate on the twig, and are highly poisonous when wilted.

Black Tupelo has glossy dark green leaves which turn brilliant scarlet, orange, and yellow.

Black Walnut leaves have a substance toxic to many other trees and plants, especially tomatoes.

Black Willow leaves are smooth, dark green above, pale green below, measuring 3"-6" but only a half-inch wide.

Box Elder is actually a maple! But like the ash, its leaves are opposite, compound, with 3-5 coarsely and irregularly toothed leaflets.

Butternut leaves have 11 to 17 pointed, hairy and sticky leaflets. It is on the endangered plant list in the United States.

Cabbage Palmetto have grayish green ribbed leaves whose tips are often brown from salt spray. They can be cooked to create a dish called "Swamp Cabbage."

California Laurel has oblong evergreen leaves that are pungently aromatic and may be used as a spice in soups and stews.

Douglas Fir has evergreen, single, fragrant needles measuring 3/4"-1-1/4" long which can expose as much as three acres of chlorophyll surface to the sun.

Eastern Cottonwood, according to legend, the design for the tepee was first created by an Indian who twisted a cottonwood leaf around his fingers.

Eastern Hemlock needles are evergreen, 1/2" long, with blunted tips and 2 lines of white stomata below.

Eastern Redbud leaves are thin, papery, prettily heart-shaped and slightly hairy.

Eastern Red Cedar foliage is not red at all, but green; and not really a cedar but a kind of juniper.

Eastern White Pine, also called a white pine, has needles that are really evergreen but appear blue.

Flowering Dogwood leaves are opposite, with two leaves attached at each lobe. It is especially striking in autumn with its bright red foliage.

Giant Sequoia needles are blue-green, and scale-like with short, sharp tips. The trees have survived for more than 3,000 years.

Ginkgo leaves are used as tea for a variety of ailments. Their extract has been shown to improve memory and prevent blood clotting.

Hackberry leaves are simple and ovate, light green, with long-pointed tips and grow from 1"-2" long.

Hawthorn leaves - rich in bioflavonoids - have been used to treat heart conditions and are believed to lower blood pressure.

Honey Locust trees produce both once-compound and twice-compound leaves which cast a lighter shadow.

Horse-Chestnut leaves make "leaf scars" on its branches in the shape of miniature horseshoes, from which the tree gets its name.

Kentucky Coffee Tree features twice-compound leaves measuring an incredible 1 to 3 feet long, and arranged feather-fashion in 3-7 pairs of leaflets shaped like an oval.

Northern Catalpa leaves are green, heart-shaped, long-stemmed, with long points, measuring 6"-13" long.

Northern White-Cedar leaf oil is distilled from boughs and used in medicines and perfumes.

Osage-Orange has glossy, simple, lance-shaped leaves that are twice as long as they are broad and produce a chemical that has been used to repel cockroaches.

Pacific Yew is a small, slow growing evergreen with flat, needles that have been approved by the FDA as an important source of a powerful anticancer drug.

Paper Birch leaves are dull-green, egg-shaped with sharp pointed tips.

Pecan leaves are really a group of 11 to 17 narrow, finely-toothed leaflets with pointed ends in a compound arrangement.

Persimmon's bright green leaves change to a golden yellow in fall, and is prized as an ornamental tree.

Quaking Aspen leaves are dark green, turning yellow in fall. Laterally flattened stalks allow leaves to flutter or "quake" in the slightest breeze.

Red Alder leaves are oval-shaped with pointed tips and can be used as a cattle feed supplement and as a nitrogen-rich compost.

Red Mulberry leaves are alternate, often heart-shaped but sometimes lobed, with a rough upper surface.

Red Spruce needles are evergreen, plus they were the raw material for a flourishing chewing-gum industry during the 19th century.

Redwood trees have two sizes of needles! The top has smaller needles, which means less surface area from which water can evaporate.

Rocky Mountain Juniper leaves are scale-like, pale yellowish-green, turning to grayish-green.

Sassafras leaves are broadly oval, alternate and sometimes are used as a condiment in sauces and soups.

Shagbark Hickory leaves measure 8"-14", with 5 leaflets in dark yellowish green and a downy underneath.

Southern Magnolia's large evergreen leaves are 5"-8" long, leathery and dark glossy green on top, with rusty, velveteen undersides.

Sugar Maple leaves are opposite, palm-sized and provide dramatic presentation of orange-yellow fall color.

Sweetbay leaves in the South fall off the tree in the spring, not the fall! They are bright green and have a strong, pleasant, spicy odor when crushed.

Sweetgum leaves can measure up to 7" across; they're star-shaped with fine-toothed edges and turn deep crimson in fall.

Tamarack needles are bright blue-green and triangular in shape. They turn ochre in the fall - before they are shed.

Yellow Poplar leaves have four-lobes with a notch at the tip, creating a tulip-like outline.

White Ash leaf was once used as a snakebite preventive! Its juice also relieves mosquito bite itching.

White Oak leaves are variable in size and shape. Alternate, 6"-9" long and 4" wide, they are bright green in summer and red or purple in the fall.