

Hello Trees Resource Sheet

What to look for outdoors in winter

Ash tree identification



Have a magnifying glass in your pocket.

Even in winter, ash trees are distinctive – female ash trees in particular:



Bullfinch and ash keys

Female ash trees have last year's seeds hanging in clusters. Ash seeds are called 'keys'. Here is a bullfinch in an ash tree. Its strong beak can crush the outer case of ash keys to get at the seed inside.

See how some of the ash keys have gone, leaving stiff black claws.



Ash bud

All ash trees have black buds. Black is an unusual colour in nature. It is expensive to make.



Ash twigs are thicker than the twigs of most other trees.

Left to right: beech, oak and ash twigs.



Ash twig

Ash twigs have an even, double-sided step shape because their buds are opposite each other.

Ash shoots coming out opposite each other makes for characteristic U-shaped branching.

Outer ash branches curl upwards.



U shapes and curling outer branches of an ash tree



Bark of a young ash tree

Bark of young ash trees is about as smooth as the surface of a slice of toast.

Bark of mature ash trees is deeply grooved, rather like the bark of an oak but, unlike an oak, it tends to develop a distinctive diamond pattern.



Bark of a mature ash tree

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Female ash trees are the easier ones to identify as ash trees because, as we learned right at the beginning, the female ash trees that have keys.



Now that we are sure we have found an ash tree, we can look carefully at the bark, branch shapes, twig shapes, twig width and buds, and then go looking for a male ash tree.

Male ash trees have the same buds, twigs and branching as female ash trees – but no keys.



It sounds as if the male trees are locked out!

Could we say that the male pollen will have to find a female flower to make keys?

Then it wouldn't be locked out!

The clues we used to identify ash trees are:

1. **Buds,**
2. **Branching**
3. **Bark.**

3 Bs! These are the 3 main winter tree identification clues.

At other times of the year, the clues will be

1. Leaf
2. Flower
3. Fruit (or seed)

3 F sounds.

We were lucky in the case of female ash trees to be able to use seeds because, unlike most trees, the female ash tree tries to hold on to her seeds through the winter.



Can you think how this could be an advantage to the tree?



Clue: it is warmer and sunnier in the spring.



If the seeds are released in spring, they will have a better chance of surviving.



Don't forget to tell us what you found out when you went looking for ash trees.

Put a post on the Hello Trees Facebook page.

For more about trees, fun things to look for and do indoors and outdoors, and about Hello Trees book Arthur and Annie Ash, see Hello Trees website at <http://hellotrees.co.uk/>