

Hello Trees Resource Sheet

What to look for outdoors in Autumn

Tree ID: maples



Autumn is a thrilling time to look at maples: their colours are glorious.
In the city where I live, a man called John Blundell Maple gave us a park.



What kind of tree do you think he planted most?
Clue: the clue is in his name.



Yes, he planted lots of maple trees - lots of different *species* of maple trees.
He planted lots of other trees, too. Let's see whether we can tell which are maples.
Remember the 6 clues we use to identify a tree?



Yes, bbb and fff: **bark, branching and bud; flower, leaf and fruit.**
This time, let's look at **bark, leaf and fruit.**



In any park, you could do what I did: look for trees with maple-shaped leaves.
Pick a leaf and fruit. To get a feel for their size, put them on an A4 piece of paper or measure them. Then think of a word to describe the bark. Look for others and compare. To keep a record, I took photos of the leaf and fruit, and then of the bark.



The first maple I photographed is *a field maple, our only native maple.* Its small butter-yellow leaves and pink-green fruits brighten our hedges in Autumn. For comparison, I left the field maple leaf and fruit in the corner of each photograph. See how much smaller our native field maple leaf is compared to the other leaves?



What a lot else there is to notice!



Leaves: In some of my photos, there is more than 1 leaf from the tree.

I did this because at *any* time of year, a tree has leaves of different sizes.
Smallish differences in leaf size are never a reliable clue to the tree's identity.



Remember that, in Autumn, leaf colour will vary from tree to tree of the same species, so that, *at this time of year, leaf colour is not a reliable clue* to the tree's identity.

Reliable leaf clues are the *number of lobes and points, and smoothness of edges.*

Don't overlook the *petioles* (leaf stalks). Notice their colour and length. Anything else?



Fruit: *All maple fruits are in paired wings.* No paired wings? Not a maple!

What can you say about the different fruit *sizes and shapes and colour?*

Bark

What words can you think of to describe the bark?

When I led a walk around the trees in the park, grownups came up with 'toast', 'strips', 'smooth', 'woven', 'flaky' and 'deep dark grooves'. Do any of those words fit your maples?



Bark of young trees is different from the bark of older trees of the same species.

If leaf and fruit are the same, does the age of the tree explain a difference in bark?



All maples are *Acers*. There are 300 species of *Acer*.



We need not attempt to say which species is which. Simply identify them as maples.

However, we like to know our native maple, *Acer campestre*, 'maple of the field'.

Its leaf and fruit are on the left of each photograph to give a size comparison.

My photographs are all of **leaves, fruit and bark** of maple trees.

The leaf shape varies but is a good clue. The fruits in pairs of winged seeds is the best clue.

Bark is not much help in identifying a tree as a maple, is it? See how different they are.

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Sycamore trees are maples: *Acer pseudoplatinus*, an 'imitation plane tree'. Like plane trees, sycamores have a maple-shaped leaf and a flaky bark but sycamore seeds are in paired wings which tells us that it is an Acer. Sycamore seeds are in a Y shape. There is a y in sycamore, which makes it easy to remember.



Beware! Not all maples have maple-shaped leaves!

Here is a photo of leaves of the ash-leaved maple, *Acer negundo*. Its fruit is a pair of winged seeds, however. They are Y shaped like sycamores.



Beware! Not all maple-shaped leaves are on maple trees!

If you cannot see the fruit, don't assume you have a maple tree.



Here are the leaf and bark of a sweet gum, *Liquidambar*, common in parks because of its beautiful autumn colour and attractive leaf shape. However, its ball-shaped flower and fruit are seldom seen in Britain.



Here are a leaf, fruit and bark of a plane tree. Leaf and bark are similar to a sycamore tree. (Remember: a sycamore is a pseudo plane!) However, the fruit is nothing like a maple's paired winged seeds. It is a spikey bobble.

In Winter, plane trees look as if they are hanging spikey-bobble Christmas decorations!

Let's say it together: *'If the fruit is not a pair of winged seeds, we haven't got a maple tree!'*



Maple leaves are so beautiful that Canadians have adopted the maple leaf as their national symbol and put it on their national flag.



I hope you enjoy collecting maple leaves as much as I did. Do tell us on our [Facebook](#) page how you get on.



For more fun things to look for and do, see the [Hello Trees website](#)