



Hello Trees Resource Sheet

What to look for outdoors in early Spring

Water-side Trees



 In the Easter holidays we sometimes find ourselves alongside rivers and lakes where  there are trees that are easy to spot and have fascinating catkins.



The easiest ones to spot are **alder** trees because they have numerous distinctive cone-like fruits left over from the previous year. They are oval, about an inch long, and dark brown unless they have become covered in green algae.



The tree shape is open, horizontal and delicate and, I think, dainty.

You will soon get to recognise their shape and find yourself looking out for it because it is so pretty.



Alder catkins are amazingly colourful. The male catkins are pendulous, pink-mauve turning yellow with pink-mauve spots. The female catkins are small and stiff. The ones I photographed were purple and then turned crimson. I have seen alder female catkins green-brown. Let us know what colours you see – and what words you would use to describe the colours.



Do have your magnifying glass handy. Can you see the pollen grain forming? Or the pollen sacs empty?



Speaking of colourful catkins, **poplars** take the biscuit. If you are looking at your toes as you walk, you might well be startled to see 'devils toenails', the male catkins of common poplars.



Poplars are very tall trees and are often to be seen in long rows where they were planted as a crop. Poplar wood makes good matchsticks and, when many people smoked cigarettes or pipes and lit them with matches, the trees were a profitable crop. However, mechanical lighters came on to the market and that was that for matches. The good news is that our landscape still has the joy of attractive swathes of mature poplar trees along river banks.

Hello Trees Resource Sheet

What to look for outdoors in early Spring Water-side Trees



Weeping willows we all know by their shape. Through winter they have golden fronds and now, in early Spring, their catkins and first-leaves turn them into a fountain of fresh green-yellow.



For some reason, almost all weeping willow trees in the British Isles are male with 'occasional female flowers on male catkins'. The male catkins curve in a perky way. Let me know if you ever see anything on them that could possibly be a female catkin.



Who could not love **pussy willows**! The tree is unmistakable: silvery, or a cloud of pale yellow depending on whether its furry male catkins are yet covered in yellow pollen. Look for early solitary bees hungry for nectar after their winter hibernation. The early appearance of Pussy willow flowers is important to their survival.



Now look for the female pussy willow tree with its silver-green catkins. With your magnifying glass, see that a catkin is a mass of silver-haired miniature female flowers, each with a swollen ovary at its base and a tiny velvety, purple stigma at its tip. Exquisite!



Aspen trees, a species of poplar, have a distinctive pattern on their bark – which is at eye level, so no excuses for missing its deep-cut diamonds, red in grey.



Aspen male catkins are like grey rabbit fur: soft as soft, and silky.



Look closely. Do you see:

- that the grey comes from black and white hairs growing together?
- crimson pollen sacs developing at the hair roots?
- or yellow-brown pollen sacs, and pollen that comes away on your fingers?



There is so much more to see and do – in Spring and in other seasons. Rummage through the possibilities at [Hello Trees resources](https://www.hellotrees.co.uk).