Scouts Bushcraft

Tree Identification and Woodland Skills

Leader's Pack



Practical outdoor learning for Scouts

Explore • Identify • Discover • Protect

Scouts Bushcraft

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Learning Objectives
3. Equipment & Preparation
4. Safety and Risk Assessment
5. Session Overview
6. Teaching Tree Identification
7. Seasonal Identification Guide
8. Common Trees - Oak
9. Common Tree - Silver Birch
10. Common Tree - Beech
11. Common Tree - Hazel
12. Common Tree - Sycamore



Introduction



Trees are a vital part of our natural environment. Learning to identify trees helps Scouts develop observation skills, understand woodland habitats and build a deeper connection with nature.

This pack provides everything you need to deliver a practical and engaging tree identification session, with clear teaching notes, activities, worksheets and reference material.

Links to other Scouts Bushcraft topics:

- Woodland ecology and conservation
- Wildlife tracking and signs
- Foraging (safe identification)
- Woodland campcraft and shelter building

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, Scouts will:

- Identify common native British trees using leaves, bark, buds and seeds.
- Use observation and comparison skills.
- Understand the role of trees in woodland ecosystems.
- Develop respect for the natural environment.
- Record their findings using worksheets.



Suitable for:

- Scouts (10–14)
- Can be adapted for Cubs or Explorers

Session length:

60 minutes (adaptable)

Equipment & Preparation

- Tree identification cards or field guide
- Clipboards, pencils and worksheets
- Hand lenses (optional)
- Collection trays for fallen leaves and seeds
- Measuring tape (for tree girth activity)
- Camera or mobile device (optional)
- First aid kit
- Weather suitable clothing and footwear



Safety and Risk Assessment

Key hazards and control measures:

Hazard	Risk	Control Measure
Uneven ground	Trips and falls	Good supervision, suitable footwear, stick to paths
Falling branches	Injury	Avoid high winds, stay clear of dead trees
Insects (ticks, stings)	Bites/stings	Check for ticks, cover skin, first aid kit
Plants and fungi	Irritation or illness	Do not taste plants, avoid unknown fungi
Weather	Cold, hot, wet	Appropriate clothing, shelter if needed
Group management	Getting lost	Set clear boundaries, regular headcounts

60 Minute Session Plan

A structured plan with timings, activities and leader notes.

Time	Activity	Leader Notes
0–5 mins	Introduction	Discuss what a tree is, why they are important and how we identify them.
5–20 mins	Tree identification challenge	Small groups identify 3–5 trees using leaves, bark, buds and seeds.
20–30 mins	Leaf matching activity	Use real leaves or cards to match trees to their leaves.
30–45 mins	Woodland observation	Choose one tree and complete the observation worksheet.
45–55 mins	Group discussion and quiz	Share findings, describe a tree without naming it (others guess).
55–60 mins	Review and conclusion	What did we learn? How can we protect trees and woodland?

How to Identify a Tree

Look for a combination of features:



Leaves

Shape, size and edge and arrangement



Bark

Colour, texture and pattern



Buds

Shape, size and arrangement



Seeds and fruits

Nuts, cones, catkins or winged seeds

Seasonal Identification Guide

Spring



- Fresh leaves appear
- Catkins on some trees
- Look for new buds and flowers

Summer



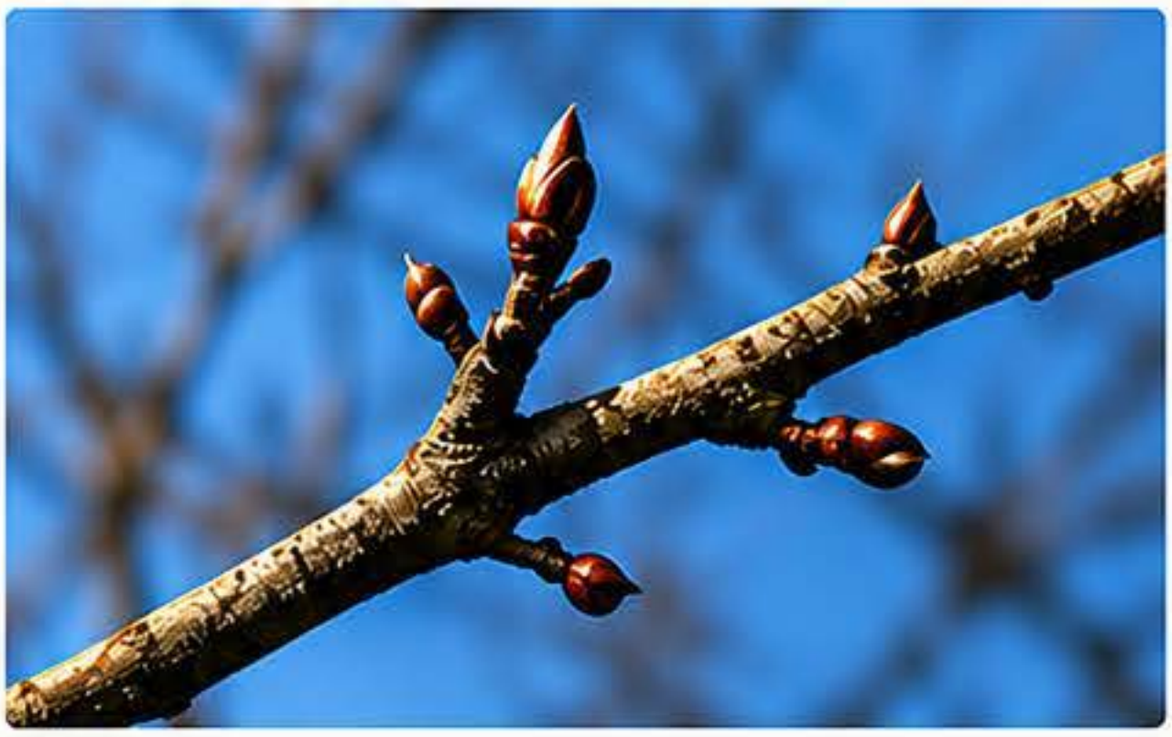
- Full leaf cover
- Easier to identify by leaf shape
- Look for seeds starting to form

Autumn



- Leaves change colour
- Fallen leaves and seeds
- Good time for leaf collection

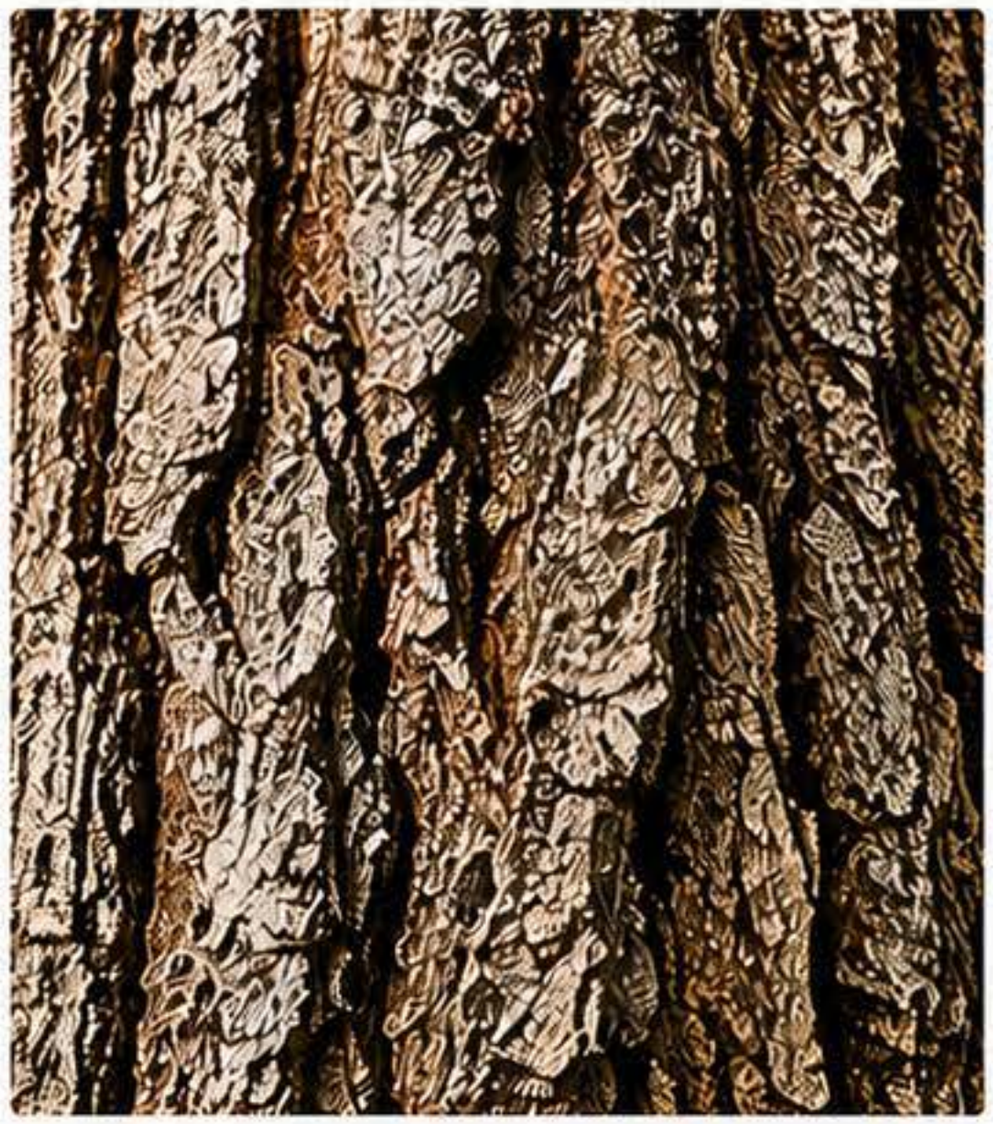
Winter



- No leaves
- Use bark, buds and tree shape
- Look for last year's seeds and cones

Oak *(Quercus robur)*





- **Leaves:** Deeply lobed, rounded lobes
- **Bark:** Rough, deeply fissured
- **Buds:** Rounded, brown
- **Seeds:** Acorns in autumn
- **Other:** Majestic tree, important for wildlife



Leaf (summer)



Leaf (autumn)



Buds



Acorns

Silver Birch *(Betula pendula)*





- **Leaves:** Triangular, toothed edge
- **Bark:** White, papery, often peeling
- **Buds:** Pointed, sticky
- **Seeds:** Catkins, small winged seeds
- **Other:** Light, graceful tree, common in woodlands



Leaf



Bark



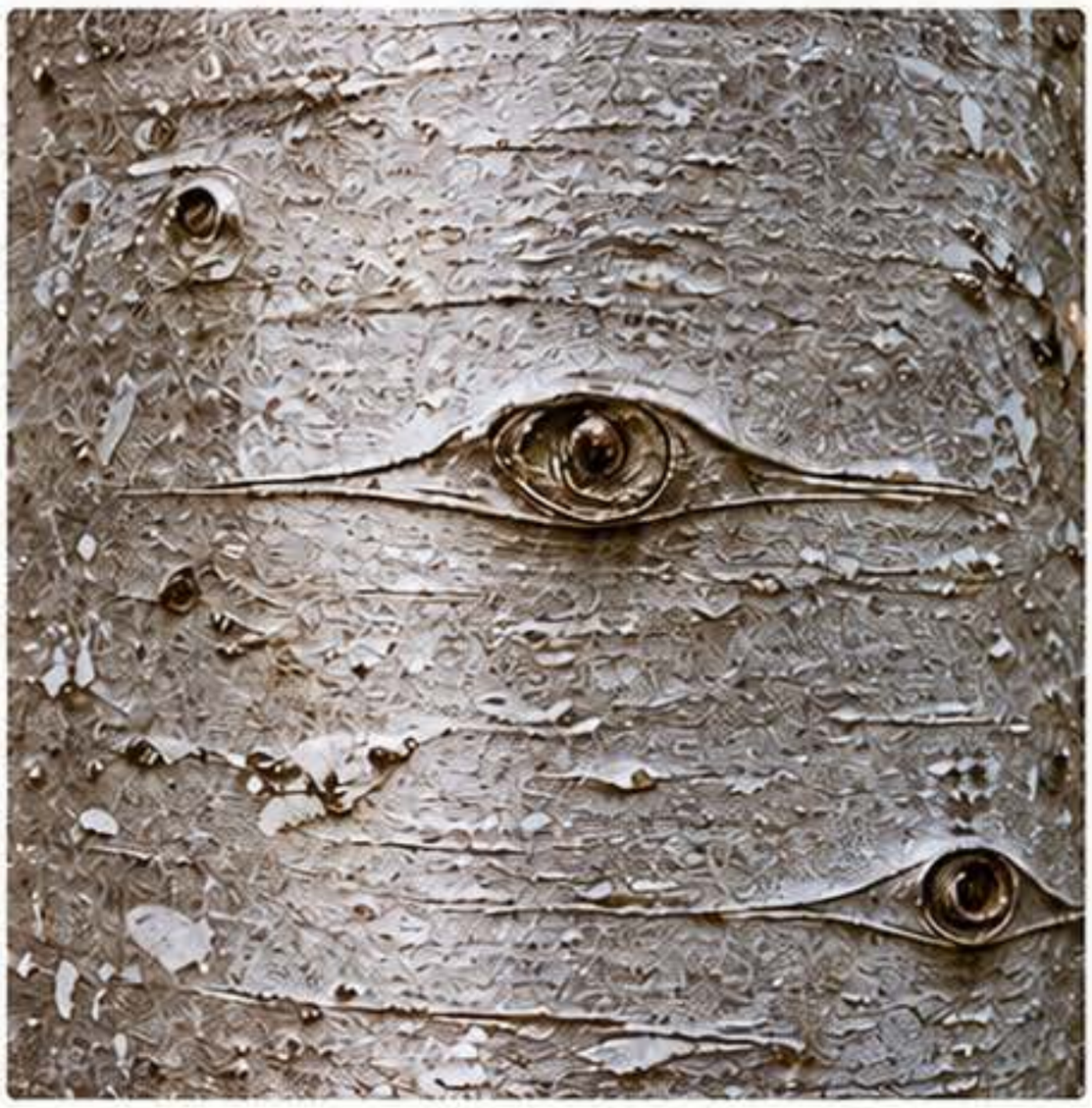
Buds



Catkins

Beech *(Fagus sylvatica)*





- **Leaves:** Oval, slightly wavy edge
- **Bark:** Smooth, grey
- **Buds:** Long and pointed
- **Seeds:** Beech nuts in spiky cases
- **Other:** Large, tall tree with dense shade



Leaf



Bark



Buds



Beech nuts

Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)





- **Leaves:** Rounded, toothed edge
- **Bark:** Smooth, light brown
- **Buds:** Round and blunt
- **Seeds:** Hazelnuts in husks
- **Other:** Grows as multi-stemmed shrub or small tree



Leaf



Bark



Buds



Hazelnuts

Sycamore *(Acer pseudoplatanus)*





- **Leaves:** Large, 5 lobed
- **Bark:** Smooth when young, rougher with age
- **Buds:** Large, pointed and green
- **Seeds:** Paired winged seeds (helicopters)
- **Other:** Common tree, often found in hedgerows and woodland edges



Leaf



Bark



Buds



Seeds

Scouts Bushcraft

Bushcraft Skills, Resources and Practical Guides for Scouts

The **Scouts Bushcraft** book series provides practical, easy-to-follow guides to help Scouts, Explorer Scouts, Scout Leaders and other youth groups learn outdoor skills, develop confidence, work as a team and build a greater understanding and respect for the natural world.

In This Series

- Expert, practical guidance
- Step-by-step activities
- Useful tips and techniques
- Printable worksheets and resources
- Ideas for meetings, activity days and camps
- Supports safe, responsible and sustainable use of the outdoors



Visit Scouts Bushcraft Online

Discover more free guides, lesson plans, activity ideas, risk assessments and resources at:

www.scoutsbushcraft.org.uk

Scan to Visit the Website

Bushcraft Skills | Outdoor Learning | Youth Development | Nature Conservation

Scouts Bushcraft is an independently operated website and is not affiliated with, managed by, sponsored by or officially endorsed by The Scout Association.

Scouts Bushcraft is an entirely independent resource created to share bushcraft knowledge, outdoor skills, activity ideas, lesson plans and educational materials for Scout leaders, youth organisations and outdoor enthusiasts.

All content, information, advice and opinions published on this website are independently produced and do not necessarily reflect the views, policies, opinions or official guidance of The Scout Association.



SCOUT WORKSHEET 1: Tree hunt checklist

Name or team: _____ Date: _____

Instructions: Find a tree, observe it carefully and tick the clues you can confirm. Try to use two or more clues before writing a possible name.

Possible tree	Leaf clue	Bark / twig clue	Seeds / other clue	Found ?
Oak	Lobed leaf	Mature bark often deeply fissured	Acorns when in season	■
Silver birch	Small, toothed, triangular	Often pale and peeling	Catkins / small winged seeds	■
Beech	Oval, slightly wavy edge	Often smooth grey bark	Beech nuts in prickly cases	■
Hazel	Broad, rounded, toothed	Often multi-stemmed	Hazelnuts in husks	■
Sycamore	Large, palm-shaped lobes	Bark changes with age	Paired winged seeds	■
Other / unsure	_____	_____	_____	■

My strongest identification clues

Tree I think I found: _____

Clue 1: _____

Clue 2: _____

Clue 3 (if available): _____

How sure am I? ■ Certain ■ Fairly sure ■ Need to check

Sketch the leaf, bark pattern or seed here

SCOUT WORKSHEET 2: Leaf matching and woodland observations

Part A — Leaf matching

Match the leaf or tree feature you are given to a tree name. Use the descriptions below, then explain one clue that helped you.

Feature card	Tree name	Clue I used
A. Deeply lobed leaf	_____	_____
B. Small toothed triangular leaf	_____	_____
C. Oval leaf with wavy edge	_____	_____
D. Broad rounded toothed leaf	_____	_____
E. Large palm-shaped leaf	_____	_____

Part B — Woodland observation record

Tree / possible species: _____ Date: _____

Location or habitat: _____

Draw a leaf or tree outline

What I noticed

Leaf / bud / seed: _____

Bark: _____

Signs of wildlife: _____

Other details: _____

What evidence supports my identification?

_____

_____

Part C — Leave no trace

One thing I did to protect the woodland today: _____

12. Quiz, answers and leader assessment

Scout knowledge quiz

1. Name two features you can use to identify a tree besides its leaves.

2. Which tree commonly has acorns?

3. What is a common bark clue for silver birch?

4. Which of these trees often has smooth grey bark: oak or beech?

5. What are the paired winged seeds of sycamore often nicknamed?

6. Why should you avoid identifying a tree from just one feature?

7. Give one way trees support woodland wildlife.

8. Name one way to observe trees without harming them.

Leader answer guide

1. Bark, buds, twigs, seeds/fruits, tree shape or habitat (any two).
2. Oak.
3. Mature bark is often pale and peeling.
4. Beech.
5. Helicopters.
6. Features vary by season, age and conditions; a second clue helps confirm the identification.
7. Food, nesting sites, shelter or habitat for birds, insects, mammals and fungi.
8. Observe, photograph, sketch or record notes; avoid breaking branches or removing live material.

Assessment checklist

■ Scout uses at least two clues for an identification.

■ Scout records observations clearly.

■ Scout can describe one woodland ecology connection.

■ Scout follows group boundaries and environmental guidance.

Leader reflection

What worked well? _____

What would I change next time? _____

Follow-up species or skills to explore: _____

Scouts Bushcraft • Identify carefully • Learn outdoors • Protect the woodland

Scouts

Scouts Bushcraft
UK Tree Leaf ID Board

Explore
Learn
Do
Respect

Oak



Lobed leaf
Acorns

Ash



Compound leaf
Winged seeds

Sycamore



5 pointed lobes
Helicopter seeds

Silver Birch



Triangular leaf
Catkins

Horse Chestnut



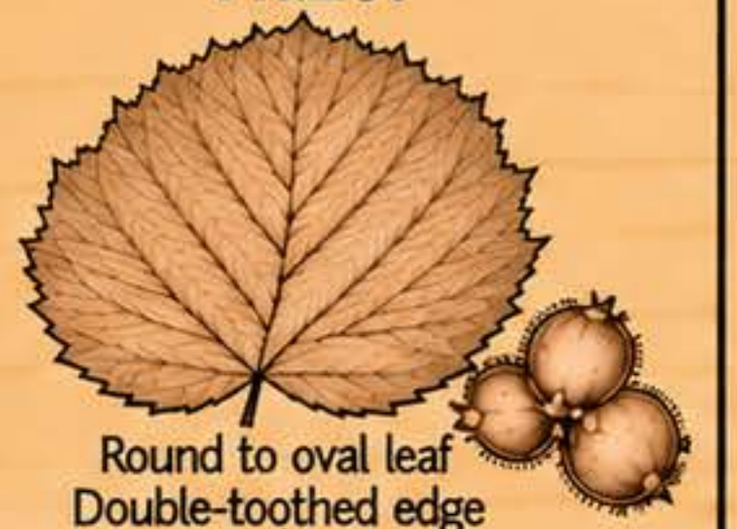
Compound leaf
Spiky conkers

Sweet Chestnut



Long serrated leaf
Spiky burs

Hazel



Round to oval leaf
Double-toothed edge
Hazelnuts

Beech



Wavy edge
Beech nuts

Holly



Spiny leaf
Red berries

Hawthorn



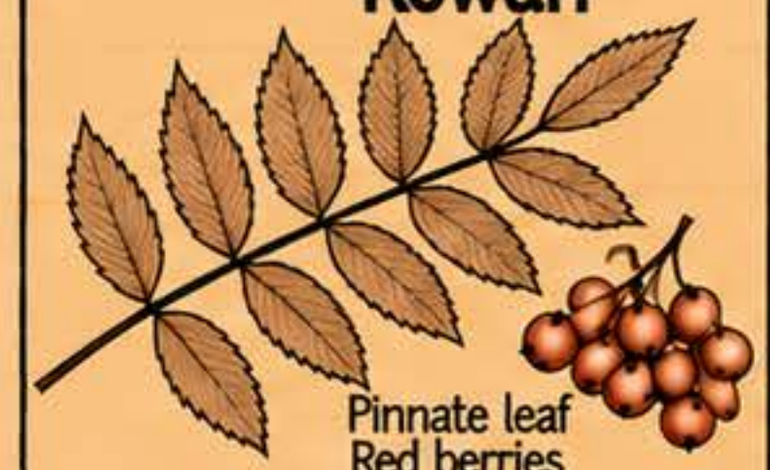
Lobed leaf
Haw berries

Alder



Rounded leaf
Blunt or notched tip
Small woody cones

Rowan



Pinnate leaf
Red berries

Willow



Long narrow leaf
Catkins

Lime



Heart-shaped leaf
Scented flowers
Winged seeds

Elm



Asymmetrical leaf base
Winged seeds

Pine



Needle leaves
Cones

Trees Support Wildlife • Clean Air • Healthy Habitats • Leave No Trace