SCOUTS BUSHCRAFT

# Tree Identification and Woodland Skills

## 60-MINUTE LESSON PLAN

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| **Duration**<br>60 minutes | **Audience**<br>Scouts / Explorer Scouts | **Setting**<br>Suitable woodland or outdoor area |
| **Activity type**<br>Practical outdoor learning | **Group format**<br>Small teams | **Resources**<br>Leaf worksheet and field kit |

## 1. Learning objectives

By the end of the session, Scouts should be able to:

- Identify at least five common British trees from their leaves.
- Recognise differences in leaf shape, edges, veins and arrangement.
- Use other clues such as bark, buds and seeds to help identify trees.
- Explain how trees support woodland wildlife and ecosystems.
- Demonstrate responsible woodland observation and conservation.

## 2. Equipment and preparation

| Equipment | Purpose |
|---|---|
| Common British Tree Leaves worksheet | Record and check leaf identifications |
| Pencils and clipboards | Complete the activity outdoors |
| Tree identification guide / observation cards | Reference material |
| Hand lens or magnifying glass | Examine leaf edges and veins |
| Fallen leaf samples (where appropriate) | Compare leaf shapes without damaging plants |
| First aid kit and group register | Safety and supervision |

**Before the session:** Choose a safe area with several tree species; check for ground hazards and hazardous branches; prepare fallen leaf examples where possible; print one worksheet per Scout.

## 3. Lesson structure – 60 minutes

### 0–5 min | Introduction

- Introduce tree identification as a useful observation and bushcraft skill.
- Discuss how trees provide habitats, shelter, food and useful materials.
- Set boundaries and explain woodland respect and safety.

### 5–15 min | Understanding tree leaves

- Introduce the nine trees on the worksheet: Oak, Sycamore, Beech, Hazel, Silver Birch, Alder, Field Maple, Rowan and Ash.
- Explain lobed and simple leaves, smooth and serrated edges, compound leaves, veins and leaf stems.
- Point out that different species can have similar-looking leaves, so use more than one identifying feature.

### 15–30 min | Practical tree identification

- Divide Scouts into small groups and ask them to locate examples of different trees.
- Use naturally fallen leaves; compare shape, edge, veins and arrangement against the worksheet.
- Tick each tree identified and ask Scouts to explain the clues they used.

### 30–45 min | Woodland detective challenge

• Investigate bark, seeds and fruit, buds, branches and the tree's surroundings.
• Look for clues such as acorns, winged seeds, berries or nuts where seasonally available.
• Discuss how identification changes through the seasons when leaves are absent.

### 45–55 min | Bushcraft and woodland uses

• Discuss traditional uses: oak for durable timber and firewood; hazel for poles and weaving; birch for fire lighting traditions; ash for tool handles; beech and sycamore for woodworking.
• Explain that uses depend on local rules, responsible sourcing and the condition of the material.
• Do not strip bark or damage living trees. Use responsibly sourced materials and fallen deadwood only where permitted.

### 55–60 min | Review and conclusion

• Ask Scouts to name three trees they identified and describe one feature of each.
• Ask which tree was easiest or hardest to recognise.
• Review woodland conservation, collect worksheets and leave the area tidy.

## 4. Assessment and learning outcomes

At the end of the session, check whether Scouts can:

■ Recognise at least five common British tree leaves.
■ Explain two differences between leaf shapes.
■ Use bark, seeds or buds as additional identification clues.
■ Explain two traditional uses of woodland trees.
■ Demonstrate respect for woodland habitats.
■ Complete their tree identification worksheet.

## 5. Safety considerations

• Check the activity area before starting and keep Scouts within the agreed boundary.
• Avoid climbing trees, standing beneath damaged branches or handling deadwood overhead.
• Do not taste leaves, berries, nuts, fungi or other plant material.
• Be aware of poisonous plants, fungi, insects and ticks; use appropriate precautions.
• Wash hands after handling natural materials and avoid touching the face.
• Do not damage living trees or disturb wildlife and sensitive habitats.
• Maintain suitable leader supervision, regular headcounts and clear emergency arrangements.
• Carry a first aid kit and know the location/access point for emergency services.

## 6. Suggested extension activities

• Create a woodland tree-identification trail.
• Keep a seasonal tree observation diary.
• Learn to identify trees in winter using buds and bark.
• Investigate coppicing and sustainable woodland management.
• Explore natural materials and shelter building using permitted, responsibly sourced materials.

**Leader's notes:** Encourage Scouts to investigate and discover rather than simply memorise leaf pictures. Adapt the number of species to the woodland available, the season and the group's experience.