

Course Syllabus

Fundamentals of Bark Identification

Instructor: Levi O'Brien

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Location: Tree School Virtual

Mondays

6:00-8:00pm EST

Sep 28th–Oct 19th

Course Description: This course will develop a solid foundational understanding of all the necessary characteristics that are used for bark identification. As a class, we will spend four weeks discussing bark characteristics and practical application, and students will be provided with numerous interactive aids to their learning.

Each week, students will:

- Attend a live online class (60–90 minutes), followed by a 30-minute discussion and Q&A. All lectures are recorded and available to rewatch during the duration of the course.
- Complete suggested readings before class to prepare for the week's topic.
- Take a short, self-assessment quiz after each lecture to reinforce key concepts and identify areas for review.
- Complete a field-based assignment that applies the week's material through direct observation of trees.
- Study optional flashcards and review materials to strengthen familiarity with important terms, concepts, and characteristics.
- Participate in the online discussion board to ask questions, discuss observations, and work through challenging concepts with classmates and the instructor.

While no prior experience is required, this is an active course that rewards curiosity, consistent participation, and regular practice. The more time you spend applying and reviewing the material, the more you will get out of this class.

Course outline

Lecture 1: Bark Anatomy and Characteristics

- What is bark? Why is it useful?
- A tree in cross-section
- Common bark Vernacular... and its limitations
- Bark development and its implications
- Easy trees we all know—discuss!

Lecture 2: Bark Diversity and Categorization

- My framework:

°1 Types and °2 characteristics

- Recognizing and describing common patterns
- Overlaps in description

Lectures 3 & 4: Important Groups of Trees

(subject to minor changes—We'll likely add some taxa!)

This will be a cursory survey of key features of and within each taxon.

- Ashes (*Fraxinus* spp.)
- Maples (*Acer* spp.)
- Oaks (*Quercus* spp.)
- Walnuts (*Juglans* spp.)
- Hickories (*Carya* spp.)
- Lindens (*Tilia* spp.)
- Mulberries (*Morus* spp.)
- Poplars (*Populus* spp.)
- Willows (*Salix* spp.)
- Birches (*Betula* spp.)
- Black tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*)
- Magnolias (*Magnolia* spp.)
- Elms (*Ulmus* spp.)
- Hackberries (*Celtis* spp.)
- Catalpas (*Catalpa* spp.)
- Cherries (*Prunus* spp.)
- Tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)
- Sumacs (*Rhus* spp.)
- Buckeyes/horse chestnuts (*Aesculus* spp.)
- Honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*)
- Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)
- Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)
- Pines (*Pinus* spp.)
- Spruces (*Picea* spp.)
- Larches (*Larix* spp.)
- Firs (*Abies* spp.)
- Eastern red-cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)
- Arborvitae (*Thuja* spp.)
- False cypress (*Chamaecyparis* spp.)

Calendar

Day	Date	
Mon	9/28	Lecture 1: Bark Anatomy and Characteristics
Mon	10/5	Lecture 2: Bark Diversity and Categorization
Mon	10/12	Lecture 3: Important Groups of Trees, Part 1
Mon	10/19	Lecture 4: Important Groups of Trees, Part 2