Trees with Alternate Simple Leaves

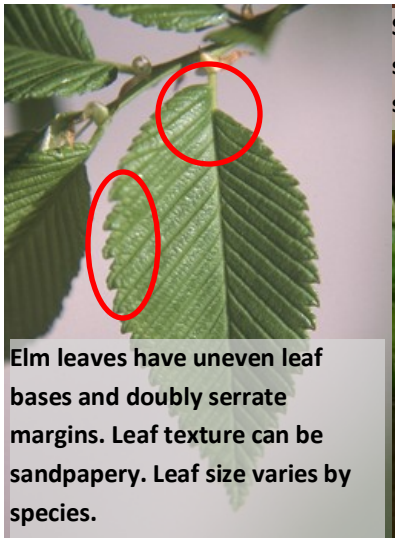
Magnolia spp. — Magnolias

Leaves are large and simple with entire margins. Magnolias can be evergreen or deciduous.

Fruit is an aggregate of seeds developing after flowers. Fruit ranges in size depending on species and often looks like a pickle.

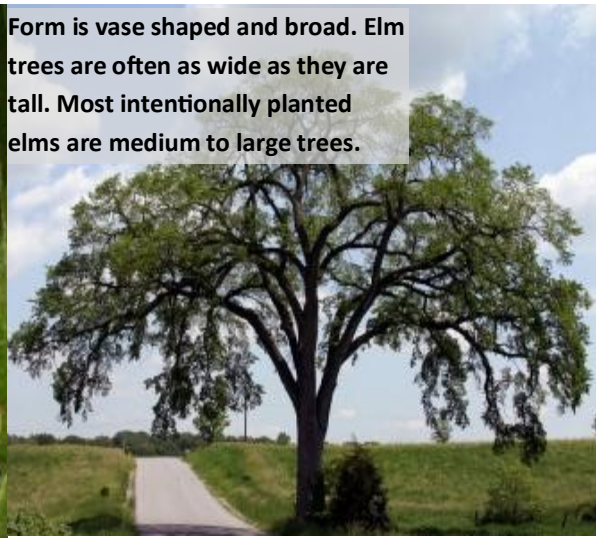
Trees are often small to medium and can be multistemmed. Crown is usually round and form is broad.

Ulmus spp.—Elm



Elm leaves have uneven leaf bases and doubly serrate margins. Leaf texture can be sandpapery. Leaf size varies by species.

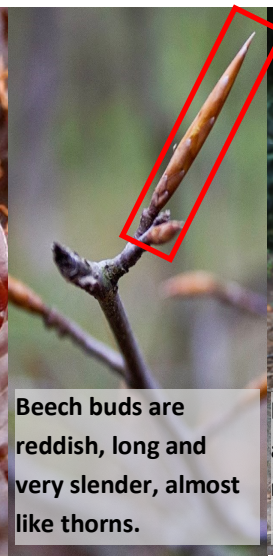
Seeds are prolific winged samaras that mature in early summer.



Form is vase shaped and broad. Elm trees are often as wide as they are tall. Most intentionally planted elms are medium to large trees.

Fagus spp. — Beech

Leaves are simple with a toothed margin. Fine hairs are often apparent along leaf margins. There are many variations in leaf color due to nursery cultivation.



Beech buds are reddish, long and very slender, almost like thorns.

Beech bark is very smooth and uniformly grey, resembling elephant skin.

Beech trees are large trees with broad canopies and a round crown.

Nyssa sylvatica—Black tupelo

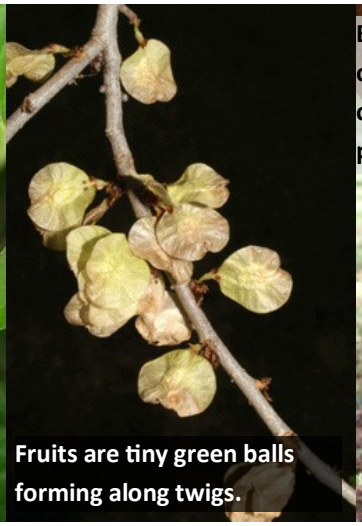
Leaves are glossy with an entire margin that can be wavy. Sometimes there are irregularities to leaf shape.

Bark is dark and plated, with plates becoming more noticeable with age.

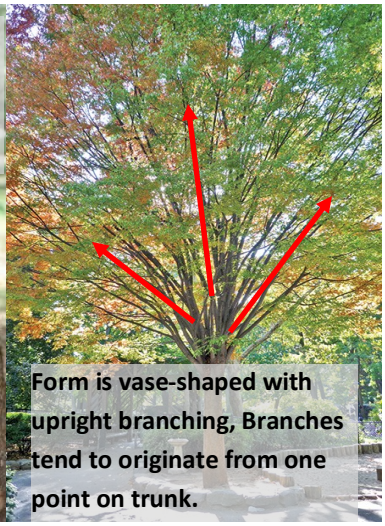
Form is narrow with a round crown and strong leader. Branches meet trunk close to a 90 degree angle.

Zelkova serrata — Zelkova

Leaf is narrow with a serrate margin.


Fruits are tiny green balls forming along twigs.

Bark is flaky with a variety of colors. Exfoliation and coloring gets more pronounced with age.


Form is vase-shaped with upright branching, Branches tend to originate from one point on trunk.

This guide highlights a few different genera of trees with alternate, simple leaves that are commonly planted in parks. We will likely see more trees than what this guide highlights. If you see something unfamiliar, take a sample or ask the arborist-on-call! If Urban Forestry is stumped, we'll send the sample to the experts at Hoyt Arboretum.