

A Key to Common Trees of Alabama

This key can help you easily identify any of the 66 most common trees found in Alabama. Keys such as this one, which is based on a series of choices between two statements, are called dichotomous keys. This key was designed for use during the growing season. Leaf and bark characteristics are the primary features used for identifying trees.

A listing of the common and scientific names for the 66 native trees is found on page 9. This key will not work for trees that do not appear on this list. The following suggestions should help you as you begin working with the key:

- 1) Always start at the beginning of the key and follow it step by step. Each choice will refer you to the next step, which may be a number, another section in the key, or the conclusion or species. It is a good practice to write down your order of progress, such as 1 2 4. This will make it easier for you to find and correct mistakes.
- 2) Always read both choices, even if the first choice sounds correct. The second one may sound even better.
- 3) If the choice between two statements is not clear, or you don't have enough information to make the choice, follow both choices to their conclusions. Then, try to choose between the descriptions of the two resulting answers.
- 4) Always look at several samples when keying a specimen. Key characteristics, especially leaves, can vary even on the same tree.
- 5) When measurements are given, as in the size of the leaves, don't guess. Use a ruler.
- 6) Become familiar with the botanical terms used to describe trees. Terms used in this key are illustrated on pages 10 through 13.



Black Oak

RIVER BIRCH

EASTERN WHITE PINE

Tree Identification Key

1. Leaves needle-like or scale-like; trees' with cones	
Conifers	
1. Leaves needle-like	2
1. Leaves scale-like, sometimes pointed on the end	
and prickly to the touch; bark reddish-brown and	
fibrous; cones look like bluish-gray berries about 1/4	
inch in diameter; cones occur only on female treeseas	tern redcedar
2. Needles attached to the twig in bundles or clusters	3
2. Needles attached to the twig separately, not in	
bundles or clusters	4
3. Needles in bundles or clusters of 2 or 3see 1	Yellow Pines
3. Needles in bundles or clusters of 5, 3 to 5 inches	
long, bluish-greeneaster	n white pine
4. Needles yellow-green, ½- to ¾-inch long; foliage	
has a feather-like appearance and falls off in the	
winter; bark fibrous, scaly, reddish brown but	
weathers to ash-gray, cones rounded like a ball; tree	
are found most commonly in swamps	baldcypress
4. Needles are borne on short stalks which remain on	
the twig when needles fall off, shiny-green above	
with 2 white stripes underneath, 1/3- to 1/2-inch long;	
cones light-brown, borne on the ends of the	
branches; trees evergreen; drooping branches may	
hang to the groundeast	ern hemlock
Yellow Pines	
1. Needles in bundles or clusters of 3	2
1. Needles in bundles or clusters of 2 or 2 and 3 on	
the same tree	3
2. Needles 5 to 9 inches long; cones 3 to 6 inches long	
and prickly to the touch	loblolly pine
2. Needles 8 to 18 inches long; cones large in size,	
6 to 10 inches long; seedlings look like clumps of grass	longleaf pine
3. Needles in bundles or clusters of 2 and 3 on the same tree	4
3. Needles in bundles or clusters of 2, 1 to 3 inches long	5
4. Needles small in size, 3 to 5 inches long; cones 1 to 3 inches longs	shortleaf pine
4. Needles usually 8 to 12 inches long; cones 2 to 6 inches long	slash pine
5. Needles stout, yellow-green, twisted; cones 1 to 2 inches long	
and cone shaped; branches reddish; usually a very limby tree	
often used as a Christmas tree	Virginia pine
5. Needles slender, dark green, twisted; cones 1 to 2½ inches long	
and rounded; bark silver-gray, furrowed, more like the bark	
of a hardwood than a pine; trees usually found in stream bottoms	spruce pine

Hardwoods

1. Leaves and buds opposite	2
1. Leaves and buds alternate	7
2. Leaves compound	3
2. Leaves simple	5
3. Leaves pinnately compound	4
3. Leaves palmately compound	buckeye
4. Leaflet edges smooth (entire), not toothed	see Ashes
4. Leaflet edges toothed (serrate)	see <i>Maples</i>
5. Leaves not lobed	6
5. Leaves lobed	see <i>Maples</i>
6. Leaves heart-shaped	southern catalpa
6. Leaves oval-shaped with a pointed tip	flowering dogwood
7. Leaves compound	8
7. Leaves simple	11
8. Leaflet edges smooth (entire), not toothed	9
8. Leaflet edges finely toothed (serrate)	10
9. Leaves once pinnately compound; twigs armed with unbranched thorns	black locust
9. Leaves once and twice pinnately compound; twigs armed	
with branched thorns, commonly 3-branched	honeylocust
10. Leaves with 15 to 23 leaflets; fruit a yellow-green ball 1½ to 2	
inches in diameter; bark gray-brown to black	black walnut
10. Leaves with 5 to 17 leaflets, usually 15 or less	see <i>Hickories</i>
11. Leaf edges smooth (entire), not toothed	12
11. Leaf edges toothed (serrate)	
12. Leaves lobed	13
12. Leaves not lobed	15
13. Leaves all approximately the same shape	14
13. Leaves mitten-shaped, 3-lobed and unlobed. on the same tree; bark	
dark reddish brown; leaves, twigs, and roots smell like root beer	sassafras
14. Leaf tip (apex) flat, leaves commonly 4-lobed, tulip-shaped; bark light gray	yellow-poplar
14. Leaf tip (apex) pointed or rounded, leaves not 4-lobed	see <i>Oaks</i>
15. Leaves heart-shaped, 3 to 5 inches in diameter; flower small and red;	
fruit a bean (legume), 2 to 3 inches long	eastern redbud
15. Leaves not heart-shaped, usually longer than broad	16
16. Leaf edges armed with sharp spines; fruit a red berry; tree evergreen	
16. Leaf edges not armed with sharp spines	17
17. Twigs with narrow lines circling them near the place where	
each leaf is attached	see <i>Magnolias</i>
17. Twigs without narrow lines circling them	
18. Twigs with terminal buds at the ends	19
18. Twigs without terminal buds at the ends; fruit an orange to	
reddish purple berry; bark looks like the back of an alligator	common persimmon
19. Leaf stem (petiole) which attaches leaf blade to twig less than	
¼ inch long	
19. Leaf stem (petiole) which attaches leaf blade to twig 1 to 2 inches long	see Tupelos

Hardwoods (cont.)

20. Leaves not lobed	21
20. Leaves lobed	30
21. Twigs with terminal buds at the ends	22
21. Twigs without terminal buds at the ends	25
22. Primary veins extending from midrib to leaf	margin23
22. Primary veins uniting within leaf blade	24
23. Leaves triangular; buds brown and less than 3	/4-inch long; bark at
first yellowish green, smooth and thin, become	ing thick gray and
deeply furrowed	eastern cottonwood
23. Leaves oblong to oval-shaped; buds brown, al	bout 1 inch long
and needle-like; bark thin, smooth, and gray, of	does not change with
age; favorite tree bark for carving initials	
24. Leaf edges very finely toothed (serrate)	black cherry
24. Leaf edges coarsely toothed (serrate)	see Oaks
25. Leaf edges simply serrate or dentately serrate	:26
25. Leaf edges doubly serrate	27
26. Leaf edges simply serrate; leaves somewhat he	eart-shaped, 2 to 4 inches
long and 1 to 2 inches wide; bark gray-brown v	vith corky wartshackberry
26. Leaf edges dentately serrate; leaves 3 to 5 inch	nes long and 2 to 3 inches
wide with a heart-shaped or flattened base; ba	~ ·
and deeply furrowed with scaly ridges	
27. Bark reddish brown on very young stems and	scaly or papery
	th or furrowed29
	ry with ageriver birch
28. Bark turning gray to brown and scaly with a	geeastern hophornbeam
	a muscular appearanceAmerican hornbeam
	dsee <i>Elms</i>
•	31
•	on the same treered mulberry
31. Leaf edges finely toothed (serrate); twigs ofter	
	sweetgum
31. Leaf edges irregularly toothed; twigs have a zi	
creamy white to brown and smooth to scaly	sycamore
Oaks	
There are two broad groups of oaks, whiteoaks	lobes and the leaf apex. Although it is sometimes
and red oaks. White oaks have leaves with rounded	difficult to see the bristle-tips on the leaves, water
lobes and no bristles at the ends. Red oaks usually have leaves with small bristles at the ends of the	oak and willow oak belong to the red oak group.
	2
·	
•	live oak
	hairy3
•	willow oak
3. Leaves spatula-shaped, 1 to 2 inches wide; wide	r at the tip (apex) than at the basewater oak

4. Leaf tip (apex) and lobes usually rounded, if pointed not bristle-tipped5
4. Leaf tip (apex) and lobes usually bristle-tipped8
5. Leaf veins evenly spaced with each vein terminating in a lobe;
leaf edges shallowly and evenly lobed; bark dark brown to blackchestnut oak
5. Leaf veins not evenly spaced; leaf edges deeply or irregularly lobed
6. Leaves leathery and rough to the touch, dark green, commonly
5-lobed with 2 large central lobes giving leaves a cross-like appearance;
bark thick, gray, blocky, or scalypost oak
6. Leaves not leathery, smooth to the touch; some leaves with more
than 5 lobes, not cross-like
7. Leaves deeply and regularly lobed, 7 to 9 lobes, bright green;
bark light gray and scaly; large acorns with cup enclosing one-fourth of nutwhite oak
7. Leaves irregularly lobed and extremely variable, 5 to 9 lobes,
dark green; bark gray brown, thick and rough; acorn cup almost
completely encloses the nutovercup oak
8. Leaves 3-lobed; lobes only in the upper half9
8. Leaves 5- to 11-lobed, lobes in lower and upper halves
9. Leaf undersurfaces smooth, without hairswater oak
9. Leaf undersurfaces covered with rusty red or orange hairs
10. Leaves large; lobes broadly roundedblackjack oak
10. Leaves bell-shaped; lobes narrow and somewhat pointedsouthern red oak
11. Trees found on dry upland sites
11. Trees found on moist sites, mainly in creek or river bottoms
12. Leaf undersurface covered with rusty red hair; leaves irregular,
5- to 7-lobed southernred oak
12. Leaf undersurface green and smooth, often with tufts of hair in
the axils of principal veins, leaves more uniform
13. Leaves dull green, 7- to 11-lobed; acorn cup saucer-shaped
enclosing less than one-fourth of the nutnorthern red oak
13. Leaves shiny green, 5 to 7-lobed (rarely 9-lobed); acorn cup
bowl-shaped enclosing half of nut
14. Leaves dark green, 5- to 7-lobed; bark dark brown to black, thick
and furrowed; inner bark orange-yellow; buds large, coated with
gray wooly hairblack oak
14. Leaves light green, 7-lobed (rarely 9-lobed); bark gray-brown to
black, broken into irregular ridges, inner bark reddish; buds
smaller, covered with fine dark brown hairscarlet oak
15. Leaf undersurface covered with grayish white to light brown hair;
bark gray to black, flaky or scaly, resembling the bark of a cherry treecherrybark oak
15. Leaf undersurface green and smooth, often with tufts of hair in
the axils of principal veins; bark not resembling the bark of a cherry tree
16. Bark whitish gray with scaly ridges separated by furrows;
acorn cup saucer-shaped enclosing less than one-fourth of nut
16. Bark dark gray-brown, broken into flat ridges; acorn cup
bowl-shaped enclosing half of nut

Hickories

Hickories are divided into two broad groups, true hickories and pecan hickories. True hickories usually have five to seven leaflets per leaf. Pecan hickories normally have nine to 17 leaflets per leaf. The buds

of true hickories have overlaping scales similar to fish scales. Pecan hickories have valvate buds (bud scales meet at the edges and do not overlap).

	ally have nine to 17 leaflets per leaf. The buds	
	. Leaves usually with 7 or fewer leaflets (occasionally 9); buds covered with	
	verlapping scales	2
1	. Leaves usually with 9 or more leaflets (occasionally 7); buds valvate (without	
	verlapping scales)	
2	. Leaves usually with 5 leaflets, occasionally 7	3
2	. Leaves usually with 7 leaflets, occasionally 9	mockernut hickory
3	. Leaflets with hairy undersurfaces; bark bluish gray to gray	
	and shaggy	shagbark hickory
3	. Leaflets with smooth undersurfaces; bark deeply furrowed with	
	narrow interlacing ridges, ridges may be scaly at the surface	pignut hickory
4	. Leaves with 7 to 11 leaflets, usually 9; buds sulfur-yellow	bitternut hickory
4	. Leaves with 7 to 17 leaflets, usually 11 to 15; buds not sulfur-yellow	5
5	. Leaves with 9 to 17 leaflets, usually 11 to 15; fruit a round,	
	oblong, smooth nut, grown commercially for its sweet taste	pecan
5	. Leaves with 7 to 13 leaflets, usually 11; fruit a flattened, rough,	•
	bitter nut	water hickory
Мар	les	·
1	. Leaf edges variously toothed between lobes	2
	Leaf edges mostly smooth (entire) between lobes	
2	Leaf undersurface shiny (glabrous)	red maple
	Leaf undersurface silvery	•
Tup	elos	•
1	. Leaves 2 to 5 inches long; fruit usually in clusters of 2 or 3	blackgum
1	. Leaves 5 to 10 inches long; fruit solitary; trees usually have a	Ç .
	swelled base; often growing beside cypress in standing water	water tupelo
Elms		•
1	. Twigs with corky ridges or wings, more prominent on dryer sites,	
	sometimes rare on moist sites; small, leaf 1½ to 3½ inches long	winged elm
1	. Twigs without wings; leaves usually 4 inches long or longer	
	Leaves rough on the upper surface	
	Leaves smooth on the upper surface	
Asb		
1	. Leaves lustrous green above and below; lateral buds positioned	
	above a shield-shaped leaf scar	green ash
1	. Leaves pale green above, sometimes silvery below; lateral buds	
	partly surrounded by a U-shaped leaf scar	white ash
Mag	nolias	
	. Leaves leathery, upper surface shiny bright green, undersurface	
1	covered with rusty red wooly hair; flowers large, white, 6 to 8 inches wide	

sometimes hairy; flowers bell-shaped, greenish yellow, 2 to 3 inches wide.cucumbertree

1. Leaves not leathery, upper surface yellow-green, undersurface

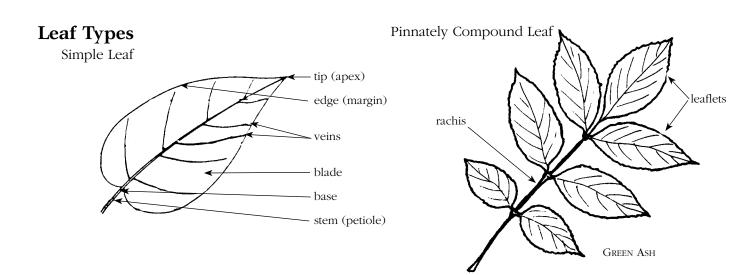
Common Trees of Alabama

The following is a list of 66 trees that are found in Alabama. It is not a complete list of all trees found in the state. Trees are listed by preferred common name and scientific name (genus and species). Some trees are known by several different common

names, but each has a unique scientific name. If you are not familiar with a common name used in this list or in the key, you may wish to find it in another reference by looking up the scientific name.

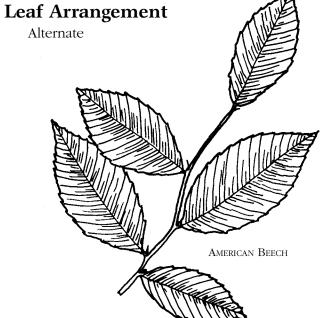
Common Name	Scientific Name	Common Name	Scientific Name
boxelder	Acer negundo L.	spruce pine	Pinus glabra Walt.
red maple	Acer rubrum L.	longleaf pine	Pinus palustris Mill.
silver maple	Acer saccharinum L.	eastern white pine	Pinus strobus L.
sugar maple	Acer saccharum Marsh.	loblolly pine	Pinus taeda L.
buckeye (red)	Aesculus spp.	Virginia pine	Pinus virginiana Mill.
river birch	Betula nigra L.	sycamore	Platanus occidentalis L.
American hornbearn or blue beech	Carpinus caroliniana Walt.	eastern cottonwood	<i>Populus deltoides</i> Bartr. ex Marsh.
water hickory	Carya aquatica (Michx. f.)	black cherry	Prunus serotina Ehrh.
,	Nutt.	white oak	Quercus alba L.
bitternut hickory	Carya cordiformis	scarlet oak	Quercus coccinea Muenchh.
~	(Wangenh.) K. Koch	southern red oak	Quercus falcata Michx.
pignut hickory	Carya glabra (Mill.) Sweet	cherrybark oak	Quercus pagoda Raf.
pecan	Carya illinoinensis (Wangenh.) K. Koch	·	(formerly known as Quercus falcata var. pagodaefolia Ell.)
shagbark hickory	Carya ovata (Mill.) K. Koch	overcup oak	Quercus lyrata Walt.
mockernut hickory	Carya tomentosa (Poir.) Nutt.	blackjack oak	Quercus marilandica
southern catalpa	Catalpa bignonioides Walt.	blackjack bak	Muenchh.
hackberry	Celtis occidentalis L.	water oak	Quercus nigra L.
eastern redbud	Cercis canadensis L.	Nuttall oak	Quercus texana Buckl.
flowering dogwood	Cornus florida L.	ruttan oak	(formerly known as
common persimmon	Diospyros virginiana L.		<i>Quercus nuttalli</i> Palmer)
American beech	Fagus grandifolia Ehrh.	willow oak	Quercus phellos L.
white ash	Fraxinus americana L.	chestnut oak	Quercus prinus L.
green ash	Fraxinus pennsylvanica	northern red oak	Quercus rubra L.
	Marsh.	Shumard oak	Quercus shumardii Buckl.
honeylocust	Gleditsia triacanthos L.	post oak	Quercus stellata Wangenh.
American holly	<i>Ilex opaca</i> Ait	black oak	Quercus velutina Lam.
black walnut	Juglans nigra L.	live oak	Quercus virginiana Mill.
eastern redcedar	Juniperus virginiana L.	black locust	Robinia pseudoacacia L.
sweetgum	Liquidambar styraciflua L.	sassafras	Sassafras albidum (Nutt.)
yellow-poplar or tuliptree			Nees
or tulip-poplar	Liriodendron tulipifera L.	baldcypress	Taxodium distichum var.
cucumbertree	Magnolia acuminata L.		distichum (L.) Rich.
southern magnolia	Magnolia grandiflora L.		(formerly known as
red mulberry	Morus rubra L.		<i>Taxodium distichum</i> (L.) Rich)
water tupelo	Nyssa aquatica L.	American basswood	Tilia americana L.
black tupelo or blackgum	<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i> Marsh	eastern hemlock	
eastern hophornbeam or	Ostrya virginiana (Mill.)		Tsuga canadensis (L.) Carr. Ulmus alata Michx.
American hophornbeam		winged elm American elm	Ulmus aiaia Michx. Ulmus americana L.
shortleaf pine	Pinus echinata Mill.		Ulmus americana L. Ulmus rubra Muhl.
slash pine	<i>Pinus elliottii</i> Engelm.	slippery elm	Oimus ruota Muili.

The tree identification key was adapted from *Guide To Southern Trees* by Ellwood S. Harrar and J. George Harrar; *Trees, Shrubs, & Woody Vines of East Texas* by Elray S. Nixon and Bruce L. Cunningham; and *Forest Trees. A Guide to the Southeastern and Mid-Atlantic Regions of the United States* by Lisa J. Samuelson and Michael E. Hogan.

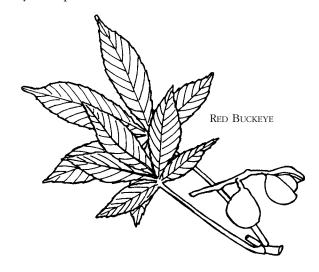


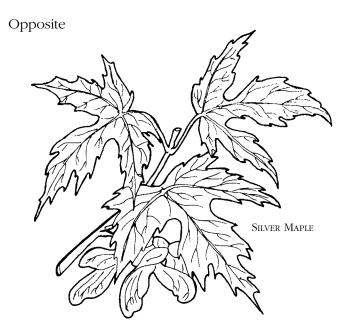
Twice Pinnately Compound Leaf

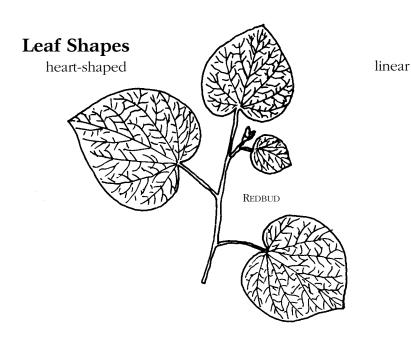




Palmately Compound Leaf









spatula-shaped



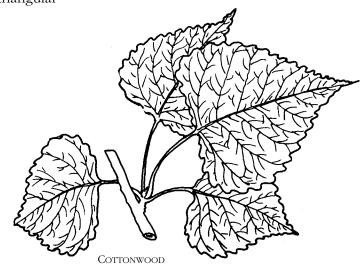
bell-shaped

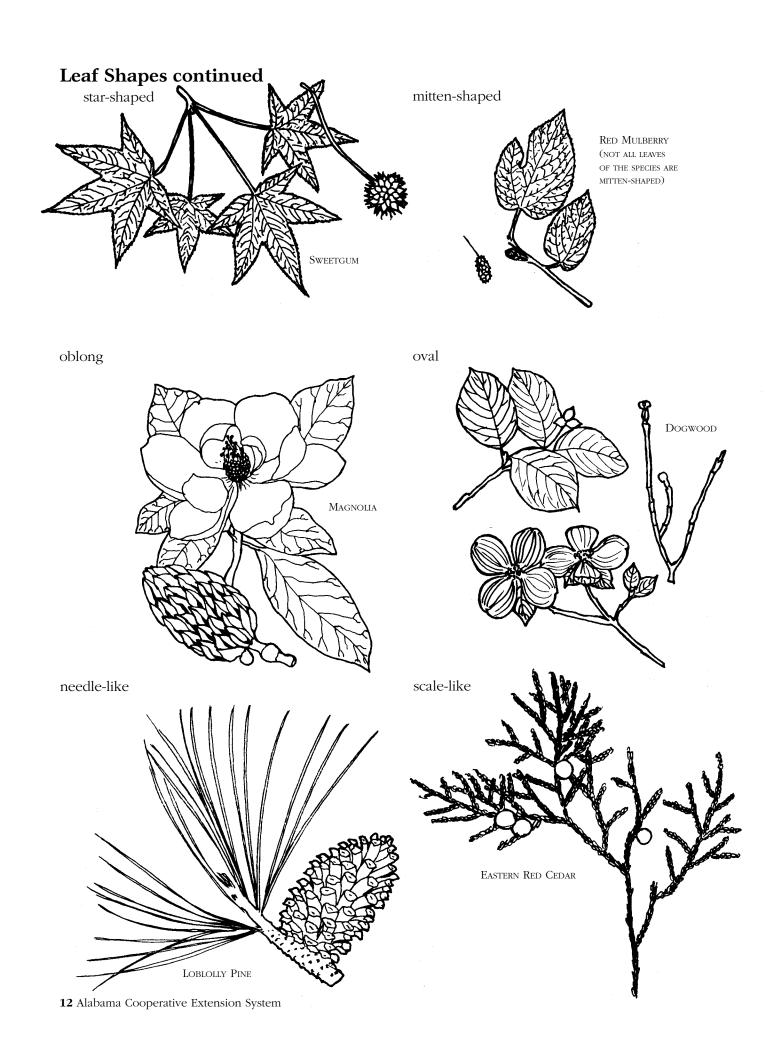


cross-like

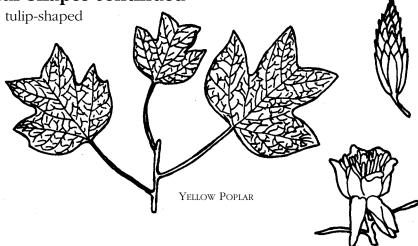


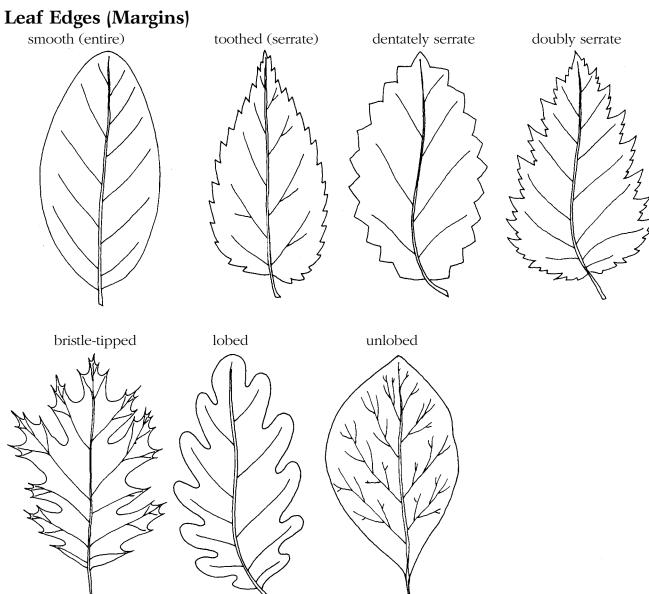
triangular

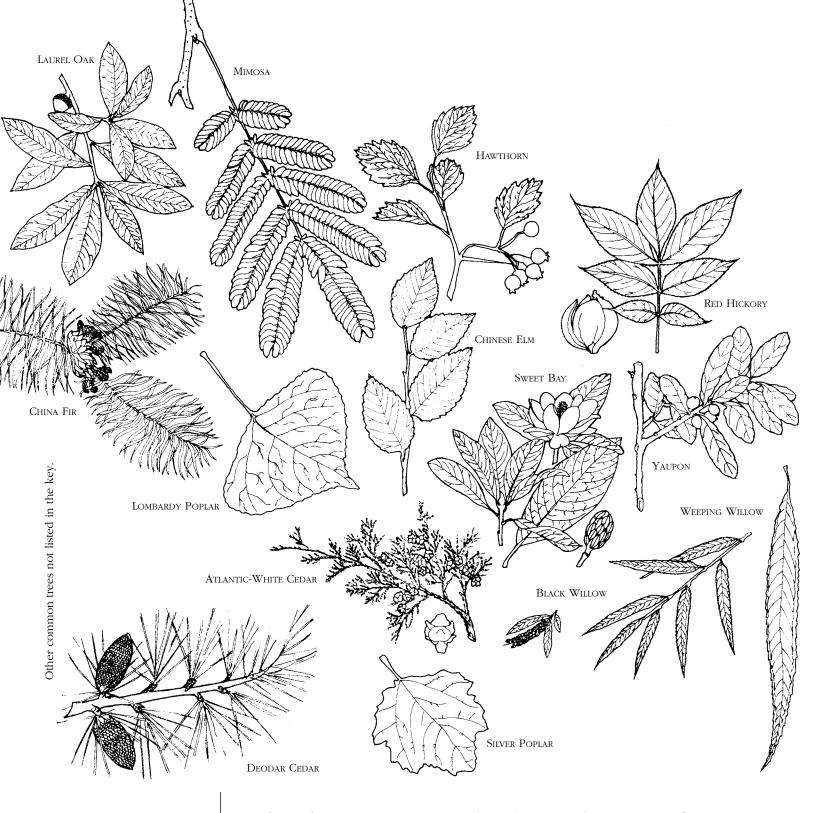




Leaf Shapes continued









Your Experts for Life

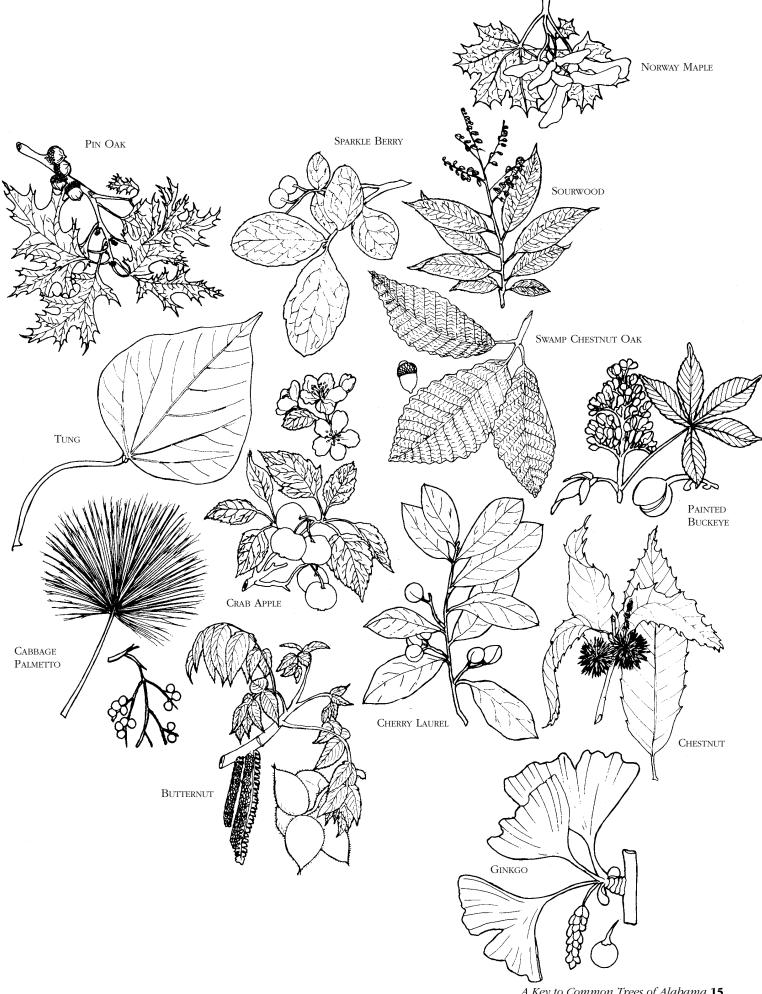
ANR-509

Kathryn Flynn, *Extension Forester and Coordinator*, Mosley Associate Professor, Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Auburn University. Originally prepared by **Frank A. Roth II,** former *Forest Management Specialist,* and **Larkin H. Wade,** former *Extension Forester*. Illustrations by **Romaine S. Crockett,** former *Extension Information Specialist/Art.*

For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, and other related acts, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) offers educational programs, materials, and equal opportunity employment to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability.

15M, **Revised May 2007**, ANR-509



A Key to Common Trees of Alabama 15

