



Common Trees of Kentucky

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Tree Leaf Key

Using the dichotomous key

The key starts at number 1. Always read both lines per number to determine in which category the tree or plant fits. Once you have determined the category to which the tree or plant fits follow to the right margin to determine which number to move to next. If the character you keyed is the final one then the species will be listed to the right. Read descriptions closely and carefully and be sure to look at more than one leaf as not necessarily all will be entirely characteristic of the species.

- 1. Tree has needles.....2
 - 2. Needles are in groups of two, 1-3" long, & twisted..... Virginia Pine
 - 2. Needles are in groups of five, 5-8" long..... White Pine
- 1. Tree has leaves.....3
 - 3. Leaves are simple.....4
 - 3. Leaves are compound.....11
 - 4. Leaves are opposite.....5
 - 4. Leaves are alternate.....7
 - 5. Leaves are unlobed and margins are smooth.....dogwood
 - 5. Leaves are lobed.....6
 - 6. Leaf margins are serrated/toothed.....red maple
 - 6. Leaf margins are not serrated.....sugar maple
 - 7. Leaf lobed.....8
 - 7. Leaf not lobed.....10
 - 8. Leaf is oblong in shape.....9
 - 8. Leaf is tulip shaped.....yellow-poplar
 - 9. Leaf has bristle tips.....red oak
 - 9. Leaf doesn't have bristle tips.....white oak
 - 10. Leaf is heart-shaped.....redbud
 - 10. Leaf margin is finely serrated.....black cherry
 - 11. Leaves are opposite.....ash
 - 11. Leaves are alternate.....hickory

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I know if leaves are simple or compound?

The secret is to look at the buds. The buds for next years growth will appear at the base of the leaf stem. Leaflets do not have buds at their base and are therefore part of a compound leaf. A twice-compound leaf is a leaf that splits twice before forming leaflets. An example of this is Kentucky coffeetree.

Compound



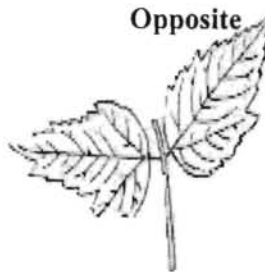
Simple



2. What is leaf arrangement?

Leaf arrangement refers to the branching pattern of trees. Leaves and branches grow from the stem either exactly opposite from one another or are staggered which is called alternate.

Opposite



Alternate



3. What are leaf margins?

Leaf margins refer to the edge of the leaf. A leaf margin can be smooth or have teeth. It can also be lobed or unlobed. Any combination of these characters can happen also.

Lobed
Toothed



Lobed
Smooth



Unlobed
Toothed



Unlobed
Smooth



(L.Taylor 1M 1/02)

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