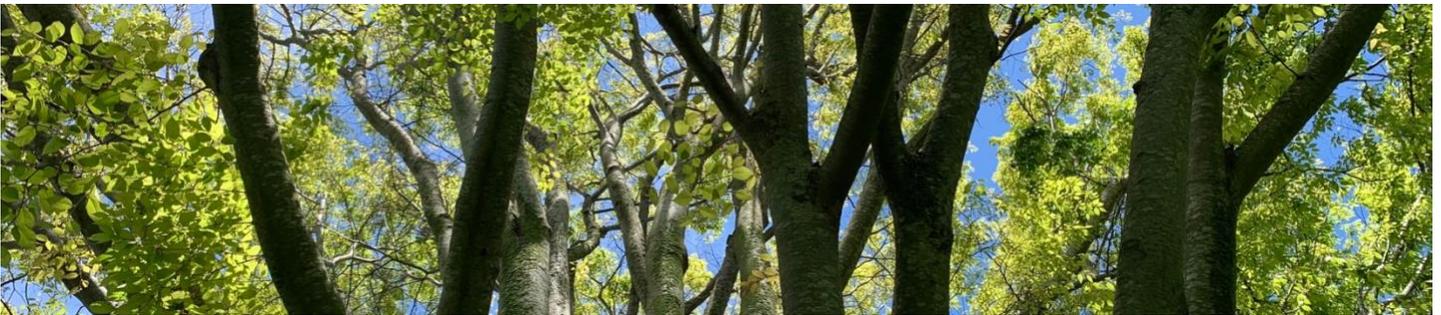




Wild Wednesdays

Week 6: *Getting to Know Trees*

By Hara Woltz



Welcome to the sixth week of Wild Wednesdays! For this activity we're going to continue our exploration of plants through a study of trees. [Last week](#) we investigated the parts of plants and their growth from seeds and cuttings. This week, we'll go outside and get to know some trees by observing their physical structure. Trees have many of the same attributes of the plants that you may now be growing in your kitchen. Every tree you see grew from a seed or a cutting and has a trunk (the thick, woody version of a stem), a leafy canopy, and underground roots. Here are some things to guide your observations when you are looking closely at trees.

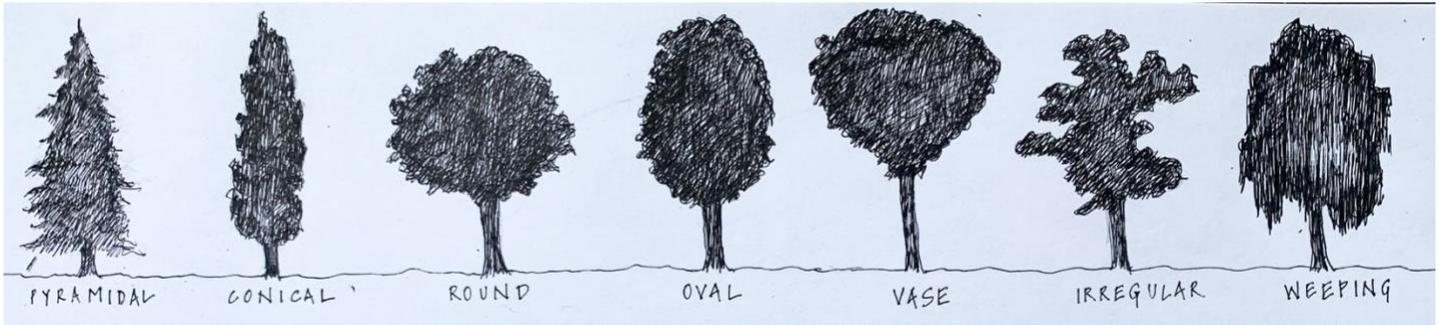
DESCRIBING TREES

Trees come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. Currently, there are more than 60,000 known tree species in the world. When you go outside, you might see their forms as similar; most trees are rounded, tall, and green. If we take some time to observe trees more closely, the variations start to become apparent.

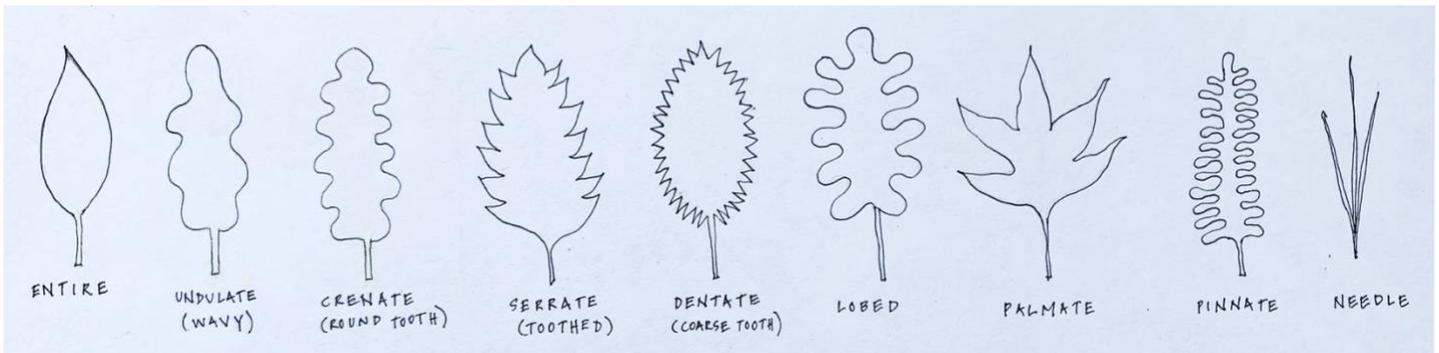
There are different ways of grouping trees together. Trees are sometimes described in terms of the height layer that they occupy in a [forest](#). Some trees grow into canopy, or topmost layer of leaves, and some remain as part of the understory, or lowest layer of the forest, their whole lives.

Trees can also be classified scientifically, according to their species and genera. For instance, all oaks are part of the genera *Quercus*. The scientific name allows scientists to group genetically similar trees together. If you'd like to know more about the scientific groupings of trees, [here](#) is a source.

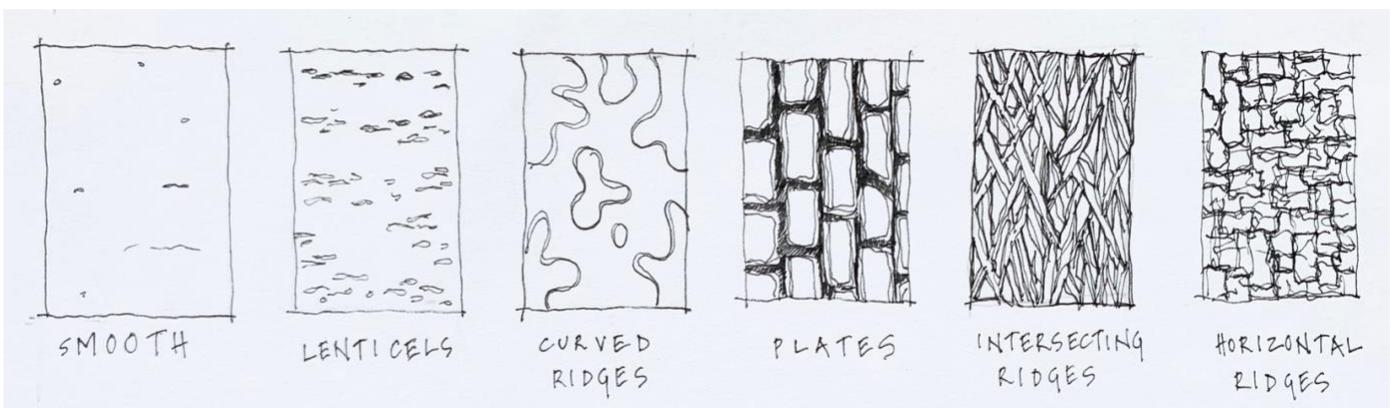
Trees may be described through their canopy shapes, such as round, weeping, oval, and irregular. Here are some of the ways that tree shapes are classified. You can find more [here](#) and [here](#).



Some trees are evergreen (they hold onto their leaves year-round), and some trees are deciduous (they drop their leaves in the fall). Leaves come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Here are a few of the ways that leaves are classified. You can find more information on tree leaves [here](#).



Trees also have a wide variety of bark types. The outer bark insulates the tree from temperature extremes and prevents the tree's nutrient transport network ([xylem and phloem](#)) from drying out. Below are a few drawings of different bark types. You can find more information and photographs of bark [here](#).



Now that we have some tools to help us investigate trees more closely, let's head outside.

INVESTIGATING TREES

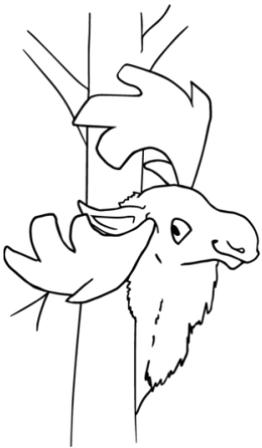
STEP ONE: Go Outside

- Choose a nice day, not too windy or cold, and find a place where there are a few different trees that you can observe.
- Bring your nature journal, a pencil, a few sheets of plain newsprint or printer paper, and a crayon or two if you would like.

STEP TWO: Weather Observations

- Record some information about the day. As we learned in [Week Two](#), your location, the weather, the time of year, and the time of day can have a big impact on what you observe. Pick a corner of your journal page and make some notes that include:
 - **Location:** Record some information about where you are making these observations.
 - **Date:** Day, month, and year.
 - **Time:** What time is it?
 - **Weather:** You can include general information about the temperature, the cloud situation, whether it is sunny, rainy, or snowy, and how windy it feels.

STEP THREE: Bark Rubbings When we work in our nature journals, we often focus on what we see, but as we've discussed throughout Wild Wednesdays, you can use a combination of your senses to observe the world.



- This week, we'll throw a spotlight on our sense of touch, and how to access that sense through specific drawing techniques.
- Walk around and look closely at the bark of a few trees. Pick two or three trees that particularly interest you.
- Take a piece of newsprint or computer paper and lay it against the bark of the tree. (This sort of paper works well for rubbings because it tends to be thinner than sketchbook paper and allows you to capture more detail.)
- Hold your sheet of paper with one hand, and a crayon or pencil in your other hand.
- Begin rubbing your pencil or crayon at an angle across the paper. Try this on a few trees.



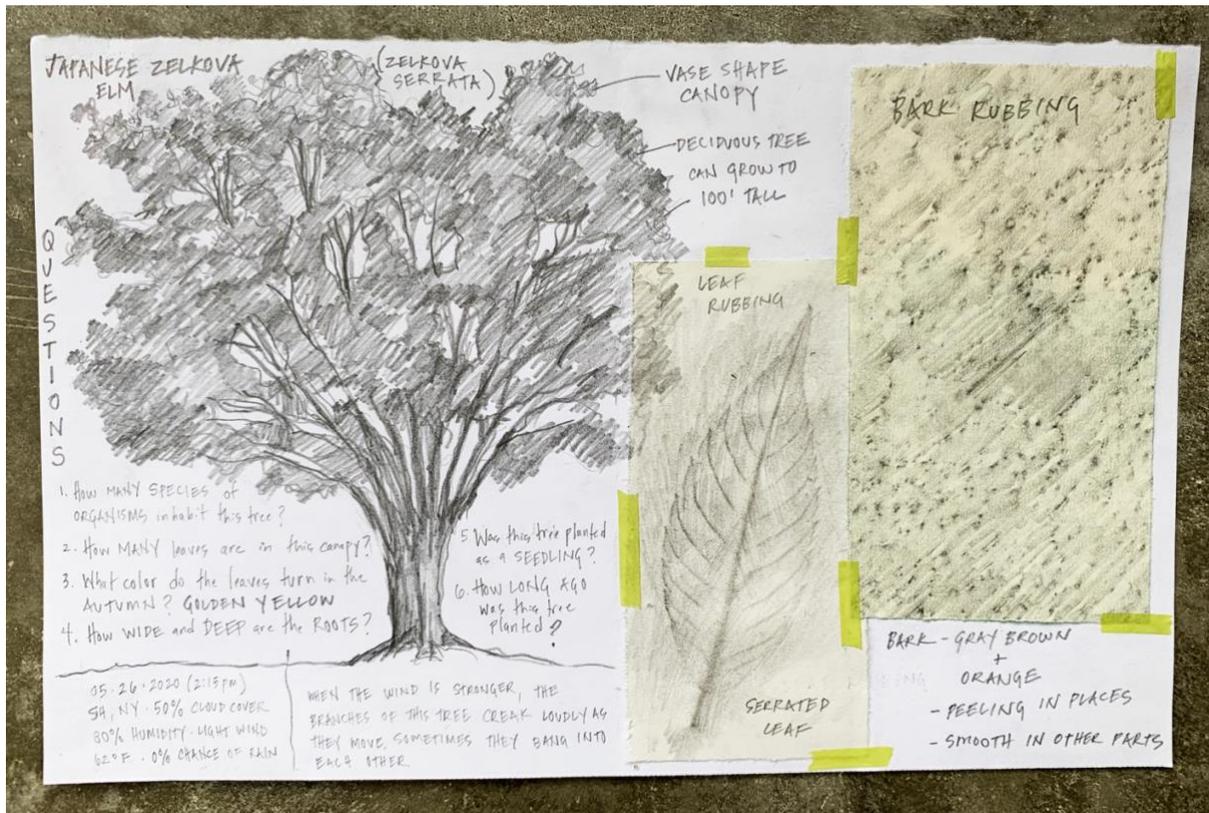
STEP FOUR: Leaf Rubbings

- Look up at the canopies of several trees.
- Compare trees.
- How are the canopies different or similar?
- How are the leaves different or similar from one another?
- Find a leaf, place it on a firm surface (like the cover of your nature journal) and repeat the process that you used for the bark rubbing.



STEP FIVE: Focus Tree

- Now that you've looked at the bark and leaves of several trees, pick one for a bit more focus.
- Make drawn and written notes across two adjacent pages in your nature journal.
- Start by drawing the overall shape of your tree. As you draw, questions and observations will probably come to mind. Use the canopy shape, leaf shape, and bark type guides to describe your tree.



- Write down six to ten questions about your tree.
- Write down any observations that you have while you are drawing.
- Tape your bark rubbing and leaf rubbing into your nature journal as part of your observational record. When you get home, do some research and try to figure out what kind of tree was the subject of your focus.
- Here are some helpful sources for tree identification:
[Inaturalist](#), [Arbor Day Foundation](#)