

The National Agricultural Center and Hall of Fame

Nature Trail



Step onto a peaceful wooded trail that winds gently around a serene pond. Along the way, learn about our native trees and grasses. When you need a moment to pause, two thoughtfully placed benches offer the perfect spots to rest, breathe deeply and soak in the calm surroundings. This is more than a walk—it's a chance to slow down, reflect and reconnect with nature's quiet beauty.



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NATIVE TREES ALONG THE NATURE TRAIL

Eastern Cottonwood

Populus deltoides

Cottonwood is a large, native tree found in the Midwest and is the Kansas State Tree. The leaves are triangular or deltoid shaped. Tiny male and female flowers appear in separate catkins on separate male and female trees (dioecious). Flowers bloom in early spring (March-April) before the foliage emerges. Male flowers are reddish but not showy. Female flowers give way to dehiscent capsules that split open when ripe, broadcasting abundant densely-tufted seeds. Seeds with silky white hairs give the appearance of cotton as they blow through the air and along the ground. The bark on mature trees is ridged and dark gray.

Height: 50'-80'

Full sun

Settlers who pushed westward into the Great Plains in the 1800s planted eastern cottonwoods along small streams and creeks. The explanation that the Kansas Legislature selected the tree in 1937 was: "Whereas, if the full truth were known, it might honestly be said that the successful growth of the cottonwood grove on the homestead was often the determining factor in the decision of the homesteader to 'stick it out until he could prove up on his claim'; and Whereas, the cottonwood tree can rightfully be called 'the pioneer tree of Kansas.'"



Deltoid shaped foliage and catkins

Ornamental Pear

Pyrus calleryana

Ornamental pear was once exceedingly popular; it is now frequently not recommended by nurseries because of breakage potential and becoming invasive. It is particularly susceptible to limb breakage or splitting from strong winds, snow or ice. Foliage is glossy green with excellent fall color. Five-petaled, creamy white flowers appear in profusion in early spring. It produces small, inedible, greenish-yellow fruits.

Height: 30'-50'

Full sun



Flowers in spring



Foliage

Black Cherry

Prunus serotina

Black cherry is a large, native tree found in the Midwest. The showy white flowers appear as pendulous clusters in early spring, followed by dark, pea-sized fruits in late summer. Fruits are attractive to wildlife. The mature bark is dark and scaly, often flipping up on the edges.

Height: 50'-80'

Full sun to part shade

Cherry is prized as a wood for furniture because of its beautiful reddish to red brown color and its attractive luster when finished. Cherry wood is moderately hard and heavy, shrinks little when dried, works moderately easily, and warps little during seasoning and use.



Spring blooms



Fruit for wildlife



Black cherry bark



Lenticels on young twigs

Red Mulberry

Morus rubra

Red mulberry is a medium-sized tree with wide spreading branches and a wide rounded shape. The leaves are alternate, simple, broadly oval in shape, with toothed margins. They are variable in shape, unlobed, 2-lobed, 3-lobed or multiple lobed. Usually the different leaf shapes will be present on the same tree; occasionally, only a single leaf shape will occur on a tree. The undersurface of the leaves is hairy, especially along the leaf midrib. Red mulberry flowers can be both monoecious (male and female flowers on the same plant) or dioecious (male and female flowers on separate plants). The fruit is blackberry-like, oblong 1 to 1½ inches long, dark purple to black when ripe, and very sweet and edible. The large, sweet fruits attract many kinds of song birds, and raccoons and squirrels compete with the birds for the fruits. The bark is smooth and light orange brown on young trees, becoming furrowed and brown on older trees. Unlike most tree species, the mulberries have milky sap.

Height: 35'-50'

Full sun to part shade

The bark has fibers in it which were made into cloaks by the Choctaws. They were also used to make ropes for the ships of the Spanish conquistadors.



Foliage



Fruit

Black Walnut

Juglans nigra

Black Walnut is a large, native tree found in the Midwest. The leaves are alternate, pinnately compound, 12 to 24 inches long with 10 to 24 leaflets. The terminal leaflet is often missing. The leaves are strongly aromatic when crushed. Fall color is an undistinguished yellow. The bark is dark brown, with deep furrows, with a rough diamond pattern. Twigs and branches are quite stout. The twigs have a chambered pith, which helps to identify it. Yellow-green flowers appear in late spring (May-June), the male flowers in drooping hairy catkins and the female flowers in short terminal spikes. Female flowers give way to edible nuts, each being encased in a yellow-green husk. Nuts mature in autumn, falling to the ground where the husks blacken as they rot away. The nut meats have a rich, distinct flavor and are used in baked goods and confections. The wood from this tree is highly valued for lumber. The nuts, husks and bark can be used to obtain a brown dye. Walnut trees produce a chemical, juglone, that stunts or kills other plants growing nearby.

Height: 80'-100'

Full sun



Foliage and fruit



Bark



Twigs with chambered pith

Shagbark Hickory

Carya ovata

Hickories are large, native trees found in the Midwest. The leaves are compound, odd-pinnate and light to medium green. The unique bark peels away in large, flat, curving plates, giving the tree a shaggy appearance. It is difficult to transplant because of its deep taproot.

Height: 70'-80'

Full sun to part shade

The nuts of shagbark hickory are prized for their flavor, but are difficult to crack and recover the kernels. They are used by several species of wildlife including squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons, turkeys, grosbeaks, woodpeckers, bluejays and nuthatches.



Unique flaky bark



Compound leaf



Nut

Hickory

Carya spp

Hickories are large, native trees found in the Midwest. The leaves are compound, odd-pinnate and light to medium green. It produces sulfur-yellow buds. Female flowers give way to fruits (inedible rounded nuts), but only after the tree reaches about 25 years old. Each nut is encased in a husk, which splits open in the fall when ripe. Although the nuts are bitter tasting and unpalatable to humans, some mammals (e.g., squirrels) eat them. The smooth gray bark develops ridges as it matures.

Height: 50'-80'

Full sun to part shade



Leaf



Fruit

Silver Maple

Acer saccharinum

Silver Maple is a large, native tree found in the Midwest. It gets its name from the silvery undersides of its leaves. The leaves are deeply 5-lobed and light green. It is a fast-growing, somewhat graceful tree that formerly was a popular urban landscape selection for lawns and streets, but has more recently fallen somewhat out of favor because of the proclivity of its weak-wooded limbs to split when stressed by high winds or ice/snow. Greenish yellow flowers bloom in clusters in early spring (March) before the foliage. Flowers give way to paired samaras. Mature tree trunks and limbs develop a shaggy appearance as the bark develops long thin flaky scales that exfoliate at the ends.

Height: 50'-80'

Full sun to part shade



Foliage



Fall color



Bark

Boxelder

Acer negundo

The Boxelder is a fast-growing maple, wide spreading, short lived tree of irregular shape. It is quite brittle or fragile and is not a good landscape tree. The compound leaves have 3 to 5 notched or lobed leaflet. Leaves with 3 leaflets resemble poison ivy. The winged seed (samara) is similar to the other maples but occurs in drooping clusters which mature in the fall and remain on the tree for several months.

Height: 30'-50'

Full sun

The name boxelder (sometimes box elder) is in reference to a use of the wood for making crates and boxes.



Foliage – 3 leaflets



Samaras – seeds

Red Oak

Quercus rubra

Red Oak is a medium sized, native tree found in the Midwest and is one of the faster growing oaks for the home landscape. Red oak (*Quercus rubra*) is a member of the broad red oak group. This group is characterized by having bristles or points on the leaf lobes and acorns which mature in two growing seasons and sprout in the spring after maturity. The dark, lustrous green leaves (grayish-white beneath) have 7-11 toothed lobes, which are sharply pointed at the tips. Red oak provides great fall color, with leaves turning russet-red to bright red. Insignificant flowers in separate male and female catkins appear in spring. Fruits are acorns (with flat, saucer-shaped cups) that mature in early fall.

Height: 50'-75'

Full sun

Acorns from this tree are at the top of the food preference list for blue jays, wild turkeys, squirrels, small rodents, whitetail deer and raccoons.



Foliage



Fruit

American Elm

Ulmus americana

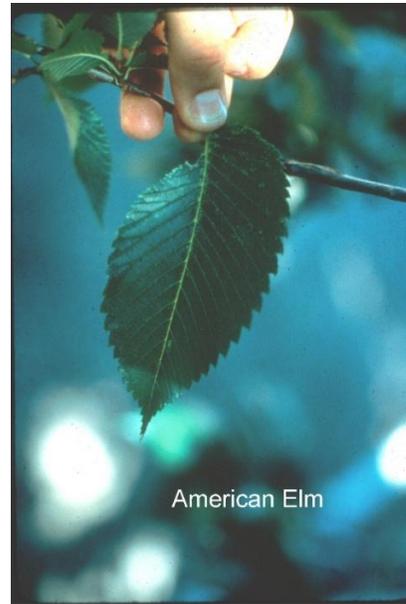
Even though Dutch elm disease killed most of the large elm in Kansas, American elm is still a component of woodlands in the state. The leaves are alternate in arrangement, oval, sharp pointed with double-toothed margins, and have prominent midrib and lateral veins. The base of the leaf is unequal and the surface of the leaf varies from smooth to very hairy. The spring maturing seeds are a 1-seeded samara about ½ inch in diameter with a deep notch extending almost to the seed cavity. The bark on mature trees is light to dark gray, irregularly ridged with deep furrows.

Height: 60'-80'

Full sun



Bark



Foliage



Samaras – seeds

Hackberry

Celtis occidentalis

The name hackberry originated from the Scottish "hagberry," which in England was the common name bird cherry. The leaves are alternate and simple, with unequal bases and a sandpaper like feel. The leaf margin is toothed except near the base. Hackberry nipple gall is common on the leaves. The galls do not hurt the tree, but they often disfigure the leaves. The fruit is a dark purple drupe which is used by several species of birds including flickers, cardinals, cedar waxwings, brown thrashers and robins. Hackberry has high wildlife value because the fruit persists into the late winter months. The bark is light to dark gray in color; on young trees the warty outgrowths, while on older trees the warty outgrowths develop into narrow corky projecting ridges.

Height: 40'-60'

Full sun to part shade



Warty or corky bark



Foliage



Hackberry nipple galls caused by an insect

Green Ash

Fraxinus pennsylvanica

Green ash is one of our most adaptable native trees. It has opposite odd-pinnate compound leaves, each with 5-9 leaflets. Green ash is primarily dioecious (separate male and female trees). Fertilized female flowers give way to drooping clusters of winged samaras that ripen in fall and may persist on the tree throughout winter. Gray-brown bark develops distinctive diamond-shaped ridging on mature trees.

Height: 50'-70'

Full sun

The wood of green ash is commercially used for a variety of products including tool handles, oars, garden furniture and sports equipment. Emerald Ash Borer is killing ash across the U.S. Emerald ash borer will typically kill an ash tree within 3-5 years after infestation. Once infestation occurs, it is very difficult to eradicate this pest, which feeds under the bark and bores into wood.



Diamond shaped ridges on bark



Samaras - seeds



Odd pinnate compound foliage

Persimmon

Diospyros virginiana

The Persimmon bark when young is gray-brown with orange in fissures, later becoming much darker, breaking up into square scaly thick plates; reminiscent of charcoal briquettes (very unique). Persimmons are dioecious, meaning there are separate male and female trees. A plum-like berry that is green before ripening, turning orange to black when ripe, 3/4 to 2 inches in diameter, leafy bracts on top of fruit. The fruit is astringent and mouth numbing when green, sweet and edible when ripe after a hard freeze; matures in mid to late fall.

Height: 35'-60'

Full sun to part shade

Persimmons are a very important wildlife food. The fruit, buds and leaves are eaten by deer, opossum, squirrel, bobwhite, raccoon, wild turkey, red and gray fox, and coyote. Many birds eat the fruit.



Bark



Foliage



Fruit

Eastern Red Cedar

Juniperus virginiana

Eastern Red Cedar is the only native evergreen in Kansas. It has the best drought resistance of any conifer native to the eastern U.S. The foliage is dark blue-green scale-like and may turn brown-green in winter. This is a dioecious species (separate male and female trees). Female trees produce round, gray to blackish-green berry-like cones that ripen in fall. Berry-like cones are attractive to many birds.

Height: 30'-65'

Full sun

Heartwood is reddish-brown and aromatic, and is commonly used for cedar chests. Eastern red cedar can be quite invasive in pastures and rangeland if it is not managed.



Foliage and berries



Bark

Pin Oak

Quercus palustris

Pin oak is a medium sized deciduous oak of the red oak group with a broad pyramidal crown. The tree has smooth gray-brown bark that usually develops ridging with age. Fruits are small rounded acorns (to ½ inch long) with shallow, saucer-shaped acorn cups that barely cover the acorn base. Acorns are an important source of food for wildlife. Glossy, dark green leaves (to 5 inches long) typically have 5 bristle-tipped lobes with deeply cut sinuses extending close to the midrib.

Height: 50'-70'

Full sun

Songbirds, woodpeckers, ducks, turkey, quail, mice, squirrels, raccoon and deer eat the acorns. Big trees like pin oaks provide many places for bird and squirrel nests.



Bark



Foliage and fruit

Kentucky Coffeetree

Gymnocladus dioica

Kentucky Coffeetree is native to the Midwest. It is a tall deciduous tree with rough, scaly gray-brown bark and large bipinnate compound leaves. The leaves are alternate, bipinnately compound, large (1 to 3 feet long), with numerous 1½ to 2 inch ovate leaflets. Kentucky Coffeetree is dioecious (separate male and female trees). Female flowers give way to flattened reddish brown pods (to 10 inches long) that ripen in October and persist well into winter. Native Americans and early American settlers roasted and ground the seeds to brew a coffee-like beverage (albeit no caffeine), hence the common name. Native Americans also roasted the seeds for food. Seeds are very toxic prior to roasting, and should never be eaten fresh off the tree. The trees are late to leaf out in spring and are one of the first to drop leaves in the fall.

Height: 60'-80'

Full sun



Bark



Foliage and fruit

River Birch

Betula nigra

River Birch is a native tree easily identified by its reddish, papery, peeling bark. It is a medium-sized tree with an irregular, broad, spreading crown. It often has multiple trunks. Leathery, diamond-shaped, medium to dark green leaves (1.5-3.5 inches long) with doubly toothed margins turn yellow in fall.

Height: 40'-70'

Full sun to part shade

The seeds are eaten by songbirds and mice; the twigs are eaten by deer. Beavers use river birch to make their dens.



Bark



Foliage

Sweet Gum

Liquidambar styraciflua

Sweet Gum trees have glossy, long-stalked, deep green leaves (4-7 inches across) with toothed margins. Each leaf has 5-7 pointed, star-shaped lobes. Leaves are fragrant when bruised. Fall color is a brilliant mixture of yellows, oranges, purples and reds. Female flowers give way to the infamous gum balls which are hard, spherical, bristly fruiting clusters to 1½ inches in diameter. Gum balls mature to dark brown and usually remain on the tree through the winter. In pedestrian areas, fruiting clusters must be cleaned up because they not only create unsightly litter, but also create human safety problems (e.g., turning an ankle by inadvertently stepping on a cluster). Tree wood is widely used for a number of applications including flooring, furniture and home interiors.

Height: 60'-80'

Full sun

Sweet gum is a larval host plant for the beautiful luna moth.



Foliage and bark



Dried fruit

Red Maple

Acer rubrum

Red Maple is a medium-sized, deciduous tree. Rubrum means “red” in Latin and references the flowers and fall foliage of this tree. The red maple has a slightly smaller leaf than most other maple species with 3 lobes. The fruit is a 2 winged samara. The seeds and flower buds are eaten by many species of birds. It makes an excellent lawn, park or street tree, but it makes a dense mat of surface roots.

Height: 40'-70'

Full sun to part shade



Bark



Fall foliage