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Bark: A Field Guide To Trees Of The Northeast



Synopsis

Many people know how to identify trees by their leaves, but what about when those leaves have fallen or are out of reach? With detailed information and illustrations covering each phase of a tree's lifecycle, this indispensable guidebook explains how to identify trees by their bark alone. Chapters on the structure and ecology of tree bark, descriptions of bark appearance, an easy-to-use identification key, and supplemental information on non-bark characteristics—all enhanced by over 450 photographs, illustrations, and maps—will show you how to distinguish the textures, shapes, and colors of bark to recognize various tree species, and also understand why these traits evolved. Whether you're a professional naturalist or a parent leading a family hike, *Bark: A Field Guide to Trees of the Northeast* is your essential guide to the region's 67 native and naturalized tree species.

Book Information

Paperback: 280 pages

Publisher: UPNE (April 12, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1584658525

ISBN-13: 978-1584658528

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars— See all reviews (55 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #32,046 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #18 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Plants > Trees #38 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Reference #898 in Books > Sports & Outdoors

Customer Reviews

I was really excited to see this book, and I think it's great to see that someone has covered tree bark in this level of detail. It is ironic that most tree field guides focus on buds, twigs, flowers, and leaves; yet almost all tree recognition in the field is done on the basis of bark and shape, and nothing else. This book helps us understand why this is so. It is hard to find specific, concrete, easily describable, or "keyable" characteristics for bark. Bark is essentially a texture, and textures are hard to describe. Or perhaps, such descriptions are hard to assimilate. The author has done a great job--indeed, I don't think I've seen bark texture and pattern ever described in greater detail, or in more concrete terms, than in this book. Despite this, bark alone remains a difficult way to IDENTIFY a tree. Once

you have identified a tree many times and have taken the time to become familiar with the bark, however, you will find bark to be the most useful feature for RECOGNIZING a tree. A similar pattern holds true for herbaceous plants, too. We learn them by such details as their leaf shape and arrangement, stem cross-section, flower structure and cluster arrangement; but once familiar, we recognize them foremost by their shape and leaf and stem texture. It's almost as if texture, whether of bark or leaves, is too complex for the conscious, logical mind to readily process, but just right for the subconscious process of pattern recognition or "search image."The reason I only gave four stars is because, as much as I like the book's concept, I don't think it quite accomplished its goal. I can recognize all of the trees in the book at a glance by bark, but I don't know if I could do it with some of them, starting over as a novice, using the book. I'm not sure if that's a failure in the book, or because it is just inherently difficult. I can see a few ways that the book might be able to work better for its intended purpose, though. Pattern recognition is dependent on seeing a pattern multiple times, and I often felt like the book didn't show us enough. The author could have used a wider angle lens to get longer sections of trunk in each shot, preferably using highest depth-of-field settings, and have more photos the full length of the page, so we could see the pattern over a longer section of bark. This would imitate real life better, as in nature we don't see trees as rectangular blocks of bark. There are also several trees for which the photos did not seem to show enough of the common range of variability.All told, however, I'm glad I got the book and enjoy the closer look I've been taking at tree bark since. It helped me put words to patterns that I was seeing and not thinking about. The classification system for bark types is useful, and I really enjoyed the discussion of bark physiology, growth, and anatomy. If you are learning trees, this book will definitely be helpful. You will be able to identify many trees by the bark alone with this field guide, even if you are occasionally left "stumped."What I'd like to see? A detailed tree book that included this kind of depth about bark alongside the normal identifying characteristics. That would be super.

I spend a lot of time in the woods around my home in Ohio. The forests on my parent's property in central Ohio (NW Coshocton County) are mostly native trees, with a few random pines and the occasional fruit tree. In the fall I spend several days sitting in the middle of the woods in a tree stand, holding as still as possible while waiting for a white-tail deer to wander into the range of my muzzle-loader rifle. While spending my time up in the trees I love to try to identify the timber that surrounds me, as well as the birds and wildlife. My parents and their parents have sold timber off the farm as if it were just another cash crop so I grew up looking for the long straight trunk of hardwoods that indicated value in the lumber mill. My Grandpa's favorite wood was the black

walnut, and my dad's favorite is the now extinct* American chestnut. My mom favors the wild cherry with its red grain and light sap wood and my younger sister is the curly maple fan. I can spot a potential curly maple (looking for an older maple that edges the fields and has an uneven canopy), I can easily spot the wild cherry trees, beech and sycamores but without leaves I couldn't tell the sassafras from the walnut, nor the various Oaks and I can mix up tulip poplar with maple... My dad's extra years in the woods has allowed him to recognize a tree by the bark and the way the tree grows, it's branches reaching up to the sun or growing straight away from the trunk. Most of this is unconscious and he'll struggle to explain how he knows one tree from the other. This book, while targeted for the New England states, seems to share most of the trees we have in our hardwood forests. We don't have most of the birch trees, and only a few native conifers but overall it's been very helpful. I will take a little time one of these days and jot down an indication of whether or not the different species are supposed to grow in Ohio and fold a map of the farm inside with marks for various groups of trees. What's cool is that after only a few quick reads through the book, I can talk with my 75 year old dad, and discuss the quality of the black walnuts growing down along Earl, or the Beeches that have been blowing down on the East side of Turkey ridge. As we walk along the field above the barn, I can ask if those 18" diameter sassafras trees shouldn't be harvested for firewood to allow more light in for the shell bark hickories? My parents had different goals for the woods than my sisters and I - but all of us appreciate both the value of the woods as an ecosystem, and the potential dollars for standing lumber in the forests. We weight the opportunities to have the now grown over upper pasture cleared for "chipping", losing all the crabapples that feed so much of the wildlife, with the potential funds we could get to pay for a new roof on the house. I look at the black locust trees that are almost 3' in diameter and visualize the beautiful hardwood floors in the cabin I want to build while noting the young cherry trees that will receive the better light to allow them to fill in the canopy and create more fruit for the turkeys and birds. After spending most of this past weekend trying to puzzle out the tree my deer stand was in, as well as the young trees growing around it (Tulip Poplar and dogwoods) I was anxious to get home and dig into this book yet again. Now I'm planning a trip to the back woodlot on my own property to see just what I have back along my creek and if there are some trees that need removed to allow food producing nut or fruit trees to come in and help feed our livestock (chickens and goats) as well as the wildlife in our far more urban Northeast Ohio home.

We recently took a 4 hour workshop with Michael at the Boston Arboretum. The workshop used his book and included 2 hours outside looking at trees. Michael took on an incredibly ambitious project

of identifying trees via bark. His book is very practical and clearly written to be use as a field guide. The pictures are great and the 7 step guide is very useful. While tree identification can be difficult, even for experts, this book is an important guide to help and supplements a leaf guide well.

Finally, a book that pays attention to bark! Most guides talk about leaves, fruit, flowers, fruits, buds and twigs. On most trees, leaves aren't available in the winter. Flowers are only available for a few weeks in the spring. Fruit are available mostly in the fall. Buds are only available half the year or so. All five of them are often up too high to reach even when it is the right season. I can often recognize a tree by its bark, but telling someone else how I knew was impossible - I just didn't have the vocabulary! And I couldn't figure out how to describe a bark I saw to remember it when I didn't have a guide with me. The use of the quarter for size basis is wonderful - I hate descriptions that are in centimeters or fractions of an inch! The photos are amazing. Anyone who has tried to photograph something like bark will know how the light has to be just right. Too dim, no detail. Too bright, too many shadows and washed out color. I don't know how he did it! It is definitely useful as a field guide - good descriptions, keys, but with interesting reading to boot. A great book that I am so pleased to have in my library.

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