

TREES of MILWAUKEE at a glance

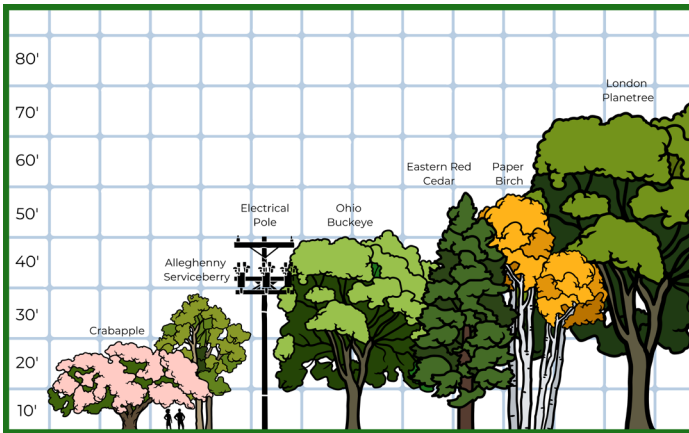


Tree Shapes and Sizes

Small Trees

- less than 30 feet tall and wide
- usually slow growing
- have an interesting feature like:
 - fragrant flowers
 - attractive bark
 - a unique shape

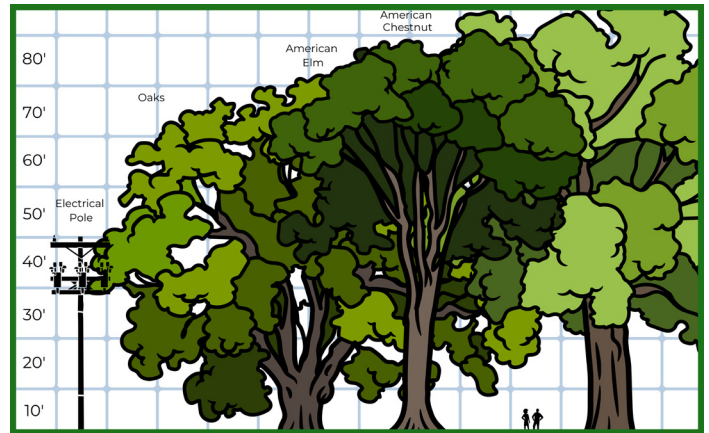
Excellent for tight spaces where a larger plant would cause problems, like near a house or driveway, or under a larger tree or power lines.



Medium Trees

No tree reaches a certain size and stops growing taller and/or wider. By the time a tree reaches its mature size, its growth rate is on the order of inches per year, rather than feet.

The chart below shows how a small and large tree can grow over the same period of time (the speed of that growth can be wildly different between trees).



Large Trees

- 40-50' tall (larger, depending on age)
- come in a variety of shapes, from narrow and tall to wide and squat
- have growth rates varying from very slow to very fast

Excellent choice for providing shade. You'll want to pick the right shape to fit your space. If you have a lot of power lines, you'll want a tree that is skinny to fit between them, or one that grows tall and wide that will branch over them.

Skinny Trees

If you have a space where a tree can be tall but not wide, these are shapes that can work:

- Columnar trees are barrel-shaped with flatter sides and a rounded top.
- Pyramidal trees are pyramid-shaped and are taller than they are wide.
- Conical trees are similar to Pyramidal trees but are skinnier and have flatter sides.
- Inverted-cone trees are like Conical trees, but upside down, similar to vase- trees.
- Upright trees are skinny because their branches point upward instead of outward.

Some examples include:

- Arnold Tuliptree (Columnar, large)
- Slender Silhouette Sweetgum (Columnar, large)
- Golden Glory Corneliancherry Dogwood (Upright, small)
- American Basswood (Pyramidal, large)
- Ironwood (Conical, small-medium)

Wide Trees

In some spaces you want a tree that is wider than it is tall. Here are shapes that will work:

- Spreading trees grow outwards, and most of their branches grow horizontally.
- Weeping trees have branches that grow up or out, then fall down. They are a unique shape that will stand out in the neighborhood.
- Vase-like trees grow up and out from a central stem, like flowers in a vase.
- Broad trees are wider than they are tall, but tend to be more rounded than spreading trees.

Some examples include:

- Bur Oak (Broad, large)
- Hawthorn (Spreading, small)
- American Elm (Vase-like, large)
- Weeping Katsura Tree (Weeping, medium)

Shrub-Form & Multi-Stem Trees

Trees that are branched low to the ground. Usually a single stem but can occasionally have multiple stems.

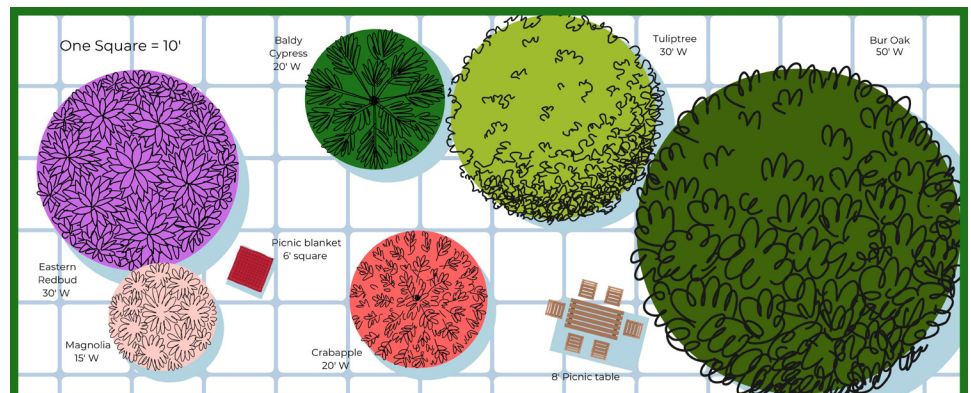
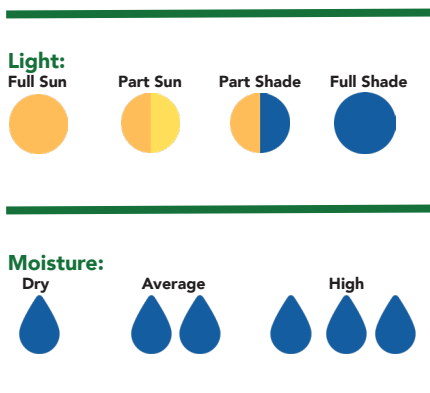
Shrub-Form trees are good for:

- Blocking a view (screening)
- Bird habitat/feeding
- Producing many flowers
- Showing off a unique leaf color or Fall color

Multi-Stem trees usually have more of a vase-like shape because the trunks try to grow apart from each other.

Multi-Stem trees are great for:

- Trees with beautiful bark (like Birch)
- A unique shape compared to 'typical' trees
- Spaces where symmetry is not needed
- Complementing smaller trees



Ornamental Trees

Smaller, showier plants than shade trees or evergreens. There are many types of ornamentals you can plant that grow well in Milwaukee. Here are some specific ones that may be interesting to you.

Crabapples

Malus spp.

Crabapples are a popular, small stature tree with fragrant flowers. The fruits attract birds, and they come in many colors. Some diseases can harm the plant, but is a reliable choice as long as you have full sun.



Magnolias

Magnolia spp.

Magnolias have some of the showiest flowers of all flowering trees in Wisconsin. They bloom early with flowers that can be white, pink, purple, or yellow. Their roots are shallow and can be sensitive to dry soils. For fragrance in spring, plant a Magnolia!



Serviceberries

Amelanchier spp.

Serviceberries bloom early. Their fruits are edible, but you'll have to beat the birds to them because they're so delicious! Several sizes are available, they produce white flowers in spring, beautiful fall color.



Seven Son Flower

Heptacodium miconioides

Seven Son Flower makes its big debut in fall with white, jasmine-scented flowers and pretty red fruits. Its bark is pretty year round, and the tree grows quickly, not getting more than 20' tall over time.



Musclewood & Ironwood

Carpinus caroliniana and Ostrya virginiana

Smaller relatives of Birches, both are generally <30' tall, slower growing, and tolerate shade. Musclewood is named for its sinewy bark. Ironwood has a flaky, shaggy bark that stands out all year. Both have very hard wood. Musclewood is better for average-to-wet areas, while Ironwood is good for average-to-dry soils. If you need a beautiful, unique, small stature tree, these are great!



Eastern Redbud

Cercis canadensis

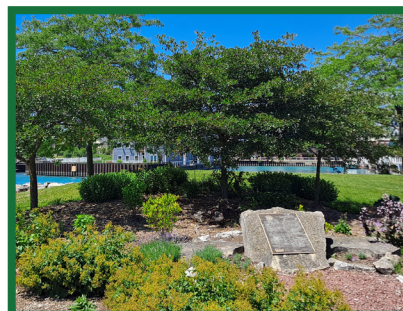
A member of the Pea family, Redbuds can grow in soil with poor nutrients and moisture, and thrives in sun and shade. The only space that Redbud doesn't grow well in is where the soil is wet. Its purple-pink spring flowers are pretty and are also edible making a great addition to salads.



Hawthorns

Crataegus spp.

Hawthorns are sun-loving trees with canopies wider than they are tall. Their flowers are beautiful support many pollinators. Showy fruits are good for wildlife, and add interest in winter. Hawthorn can thrive in dry soil.



Amur Maackia

Maackia amurensis

One of the most drought tolerant trees you can plant, it's a member of the Pea family and can make its own nutrients in the soil. It blooms in summer with big clusters of white flowers, and in Fall, the blue-green leaves turn yellow. The tree has, irregular branching with shiny green/gold bark unlike any other tree.



Ornamental Trees

Cherry

Prunus spp.



Cherries have long been planted for the beauty and fragrance of their spring flowers. Many also have beautiful bark and fall color. There are several native cherry trees that are commonly found in Wisconsin that are important for birds and insects. Cherry trees are some of the best food sources for wildlife.

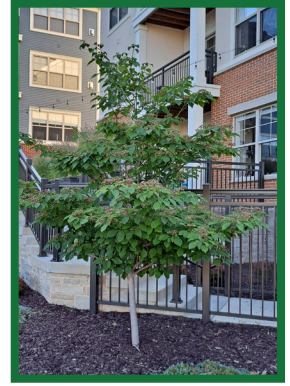


Corneliancherry Dogwood and Pagoda Dogwood

Cornus mas and Cornus alternifolia



Corneliancherry Dogwood is a showstopper in spring with early yellow flowers. Pagoda Dogwood shows off in fall with a beautiful blend of purples, reds, and oranges. Pagoda is more sensitive to drought due to its shallow roots, and should not be planted in full sun without adequate water.



Common Witchhazel & Vernal Witchhazel

Hamamelis virginiana and Hamamelis vernalis



Often described as a large shrub, its small stature (<20' tall and wide) makes it ideal for shady, restricted sites. Common Witchhazel produces canary yellow flowers, in Fall the leaves turn a golden yellow. Its smaller cousin, Vernal Witchhazel, blooms with petite yellow and red flowers. Both are great choices where you have dry shade like under another tree. In sun, both trees will look full and bushy, while in shade they will be more open and airy. The bark can be used in a variety of natural remedies.



Shade Trees

Shade trees grow large and provide shade. They can have large or small leaves, be wide or narrow, and grow at different rates. These are some types of shade trees that grow well in Milwaukee.

Oaks

Quercus spp.



Oaks are sturdy, large, beautiful trees. The two groups are white oaks, and black oaks. White oaks have smooth leaf edges, and fall color ranging from yellow to purple-red, and a lighter bark. The black oaks have pointy leaves, red to maroon fall color, and darker bark.



Elms

Ulmus spp.

Large to Very Large



Many Elms were wiped out during the Dutch Elm Disease epidemic, but new disease-resistant types have been developed. Elms are large, fast-growing shade trees. Their fast growth rate means that they absorb lots of rainwater, reducing flooding.



Lindens

Tilia spp.

Medium to Large



Lindens' cone-shaped canopy, produces fragrant flowers in summer, and has beautiful yellow Fall color. They're great for a space where you'd like the shape of an evergreen without the needles over winter.



Kentucky Coffeetree

Gymnocladus dioica
Large



This tree isn't super common in Kentucky, and its beans can be roasted as a caffeine-free coffee. Its coarse branching and medium-sized leaflets mean you'll get plenty of shade in summer, sun in winter, and little fall cleanup.



Shade Trees

Horsechestnut & Buckeye

Aesculus hippocastanum & Aesculus glabra
Medium to Large

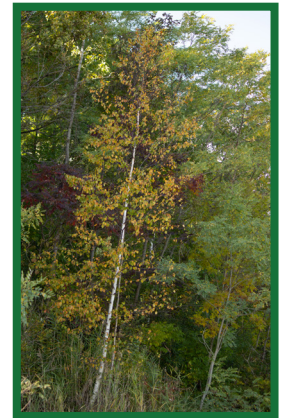
These are medium-to-large trees with unique five-leaflet leaves, and produce late spring flowers. Horsechestnuts are larger and produce bigger blooms. Buckeyes are smaller, and have reliable red fall color and smaller nuts.



Birch

Betulus spp.
Medium to Large

Birch are fine-textured, medium trees. Well-known is the Paper Birch, whose bark can be used for writing on or for canoe building. River Birch, Yellow Birch, and Gray Birch also grow well here depending on space.



Shagbark Hickory & Bitternut Hickory

Carya ovata and Carya cordiformis
Large to Very Large

Hickory trees are known for their nuts and strong wood. Shagbark Hickory gets its name from its shaggy bark. Bitternut Hickory has bitter nuts and sulfur-yellow buds. Both are moderate to fast growers. Bitternut Hickory is more common in wetter areas while Shagbark Hickory is more common on the edges of prairies. Both trees produce edible nuts and have stunning golden fall color.



Northern Catalpa

Catalpa speciosa
Large to Very Large

Everything about this tree is big! Big heart shaped leaves; big white flowers in summer, and big long seed pods. It's fast growing, coarse textured, and tolerates a wide range of soils.



Katsuratree

Cercidiphyllum japonicum
Medium to Large

A beautiful, finely branched tree with medium sized leaves. Its red buds, can be showy in winter. It thrives where there is adequate water and is not drought tolerant. Male and female trees are separate; male trees produce pollen while female trees produce little fruits that look like tiny bananas along the stem. The fruits are not messy and in Fall, the foliage turns a beautiful peach color and emits a sweet aroma.



Larch

Larix spp.
Medium to Large

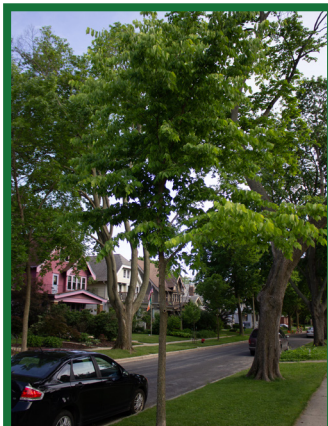
Larches are deciduous conifers. Wisconsin's, native species is the Tamarack, which grows in bogs throughout the state. European Larch is also planted as an ornamental in our region.



Common Hackberry

Celtis occidentalis
Medium to Large

Hackberry is a common sight along river banks and other low-lying areas, but don't let that fool you- the tree can also tolerate drought and a variety of soils. Hackberry is a durable, reliable tree with few disease problems, none of which are fatal. Its bumpy bark is instantly recognizable and the medium leaves don't create too much to clean in fall.



Ginkgo

Ginkgo biloba
Medium to Large

Ginkgo trees are a deciduous conifer and a living fossil. Like the Larches, their leaves are arranged around spurs that are spaced along the branches. Trees generally have a pyramidal shape. For fall color, Ginkgo is truly in a league of its own for its dramatic color



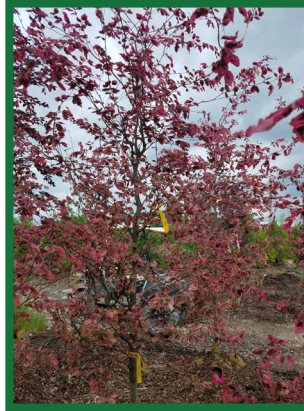
Shade Trees

American Beech & European Beech

Fagus grandifolia and *Fagus sylvatica*
Large (some Medium)



The smooth gray bark of Beech trees stands out in winter, and their rich green leaves in summer are tremendous for shade. European Beech have been cultivated for different leaf colors like purple and red- some even have purple, pink, and white leaves on the same plant! A long-lived tree, Beech are beautiful additions to the urban forest.



Honeylocust

Gleditsia triacanthos
Large to Very Large



Honeylocust is a spreading, sturdy tree with small leaves that are great for keeping your grass healthy. While the trees can be prone to dropping small twigs during windstorms, they have some of the strongest wood of all trees and are unlikely to drop major limbs. Their golden yellow fall color and coarse texture mean they let plenty of sunlight in during the winter months, and they can adapt to a wide variety of sites.



Dawn Redwood

Metasequoia glyptostroboides
Large to Very Large



Dawn Redwood is a living fossil- the tree was thought to be extinct but was discovered in China in 1942. Since then, the tree has been brought to many different countries and grown for its beautiful structure and orange needle color in fall. The tree can be prone to winter damage if we have unseasonably cold temperatures, but it should perform reliably well in Milwaukee due to the lake effect from Lake Michigan.



Baldcypress

Taxodium distichum
Medium to Large



Baldcypress is native to the southern part of the US and is often found in swamps and riverbanks. It's called 'bald' cypress because it sheds its needles every fall to grow new ones each spring. In its natural habitat, Baldcypress will develop wood knobs that come up from the ground called 'Knees'.



Tuliptree

Liriodendron tulipifera
Large to Very Large



Tuliptree gets its name from its yellow tulip-like flowers it produces in summer. It's a moderate to fast growing tree with a columnar to pyramidal canopy. It has coarse texture and a unique leaf shape. In fall, the leaves turn a mix of yellow and brown, but from a distance it appears orange. The 'tulip' flowers dry out and become clusters of small paddle-like seeds that are not messy.



Amur Corktree

Phellodendron lavallei
Medium to Large



This is a broad, open-branching tree that is great for shade. Corktree is a tough plant that can grow in a variety of soils and light conditions. In fall, its leaves turn a bright canary yellow. The shape of the tree is very distinctive, and is an excellent alternative to something like Kentucky Coffeetree or Honeylocust.



London Planetree

Platanus x acerfolia
Large to Very Large



London Planetree is a cross between the American Sycamore and the Oriental Sycamore. Because of this, it grows faster and is more adaptable than either of its parents. London Planetree has showy peeling bark that turns from gray-brown to pure white then mottled with green. The leaves resemble a maple leaf and turn brown and yellow in fall. While not particularly showy when it comes to fall color or flowering, the tree's one-of-a-kind bark and fast growth rate make it an excellent option for shade.



Aspens

Populus spp.
Large to Very Large



Aspens include Bigtooth and Quaking Aspen, Balsam Poplar, Cottonwood, and some other hybrids. They are known for their extremely fast growth and colony-forming habit- if one trunk is damaged, it will send up several new trunks from its roots around the tree. Aspens also tend to have showy leaves that flutter in the wind, which is beautiful in fall with their golden color.



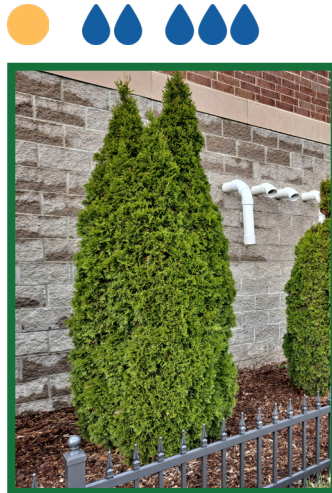
Evergreens

Evergreens have leaves (needles) that stay green year-round. While they don't absorb as much rainwater as a deciduous tree of the same size, they still have an important job in the urban forest of capturing pollution and providing shade. They also help reduce winter heating costs when planted on the north and west sides of the house to block winter winds.

Arborvitae/White Cedar

Thuja occidentalis
Medium to Large

White Cedar is one of the most adaptable evergreens available and can tolerate wet soils (something most other evergreens struggle with). A consistent problem they have is deer damage as the soft foliage is a tasty winter snack. In Milwaukee you likely won't have to worry too much about animal damage on your trees. White Cedar can also be sheared to maintain a certain size, not something that all evergreens do.



Junipers

Juniperus spp.
Small to Large

Junipers are tough like White Cedar, but they thrive in dry, poor soils and survive in a variety of spaces. They can tolerate some shade, as well, but they won't have as thick of foliage as the same plant in a sunny location. The only restriction on Junipers is that they cannot tolerate wet soils - too wet, and their roots begin to rot, causing the entire tree/shrub to die back. Junipers can also be sheared. Their small "berries" are a favorite of birds in winter.



Pines

Pinus spp.
Medium to Large

Pines are one of the most distinctive evergreens in Wisconsin. While pines are more common in the northern part of Wisconsin, some can grow in Milwaukee, especially where there are sandy soils remaining from the glaciers that made the Great Lakes 10,000 years ago. In general, Pines prefer a well-drained site, so avoid planting them in areas where water tends to sit.



Spruce

Picea spp.
Medium to Large

Spruce trees are usually what comes to mind when you think of 'Evergreen'. They have conical to crowns, thick needles and branching, and cones of varying sizes. The needle color can range from dark emerald green to a light blue. Colorado Blue Spruce was commonly planted a few decades ago, however the tree is prone to a needle disease. Avoid planting Blue Spruce unless you have good air flow and are willing to treat the tree for disease.



Firs

Abies spp.
Medium to Large

Firs are not common in Milwaukee as they usually prefer growing in sandy soils. However, Balsam Fir and White Fir have been planted in our area with some success, and smaller types like Korean Fir can be beautiful dwarf evergreens in a garden. While Spruce and Pine trees produce cones that can drop, Fir cones fall apart on the tree, leaving nothing to pick up in spring. Firs and Spruces are the two most common Christmas trees, and they are great for winter decorating with lights.



Hemlock

Tsuga canadensis
Medium to Large

Hemlock is a slow-growing native evergreen that stays full and thick even in heavy shade. While the tree is slow-growing, it can reach a large size over its lifetime- trees that are over 50 feet tall are not uncommon in northern Wisconsin. Their soft, delicate needles stay a rich dark green in winter, and dainty cones dangle from the branch tips. In suburban and rural areas, Hemlock is often the victim of deer damage, but this is unlikely to be an issue in Milwaukee where deer populations are not high. However, if you live near a park or parkway, you will need



About This Booklet

This book was created as part of the 2022 Sherman Park Urban Forestry Grant, funded by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. We created this look book to educate community members about the different kinds of trees that survive and thrive in our city.

Why Plant Trees?

You may know that trees turn carbon dioxide into oxygen for us to breathe, but did you know that their leaves can also capture air pollution? Or that their roots absorb thousands of gallons of stormwater every year, reducing basement backups and flooding? And did you know that trees have a significant impact on the health and well-being of the people that live near them, both mentally and physically?

Learn more about the benefits of trees in Milwaukee at: branchoutmke.org.

Disclaimer

To list all of the trees that could be planted in Milwaukee and provide information on each of them would take dozens if not hundreds of pages more than what is in this book. This look book shows you some of the trees that you could plant in your yard or community spaces. If you have a tree that you'd like to plant that isn't listed in this book, just make sure that it's hardy for Zone 5 (our region) so that it can tolerate our winters.



Branch Out Milwaukee is a collaborative network that strives to improve Milwaukee's tree canopy for healthy communities. Branch Out MKE was formed in 2017 at Milwaukee Water Commons to foster communication, collaboration, and experimentation between the various government, nonprofit, and community groups in our city when it comes to greening our urban forest canopy.

Email: info@milwaukeeewatercommons.org

Call: 414-763-6199

Learn more: branchoutmke.org



Milwaukee Water Commons is a cross-city network that fosters connection, collaboration and broad community leadership on behalf of our common waters.

We promote stewardship of, equitable access to and shared decision-making for our common waters. We believe that Milwaukee is a model Water City where we all have a stake in the health of our waters and all share in their stewardship as well as their benefits.



MILWAUKEE WATER COMMONS

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