Randall's Island Park Alliance

Observe a Street Tree: Identification

What is a street tree?

Street trees are planted trees that line streets. Often you will find them in small patches of dirt or grass, called tree pits, along the sidewalk.

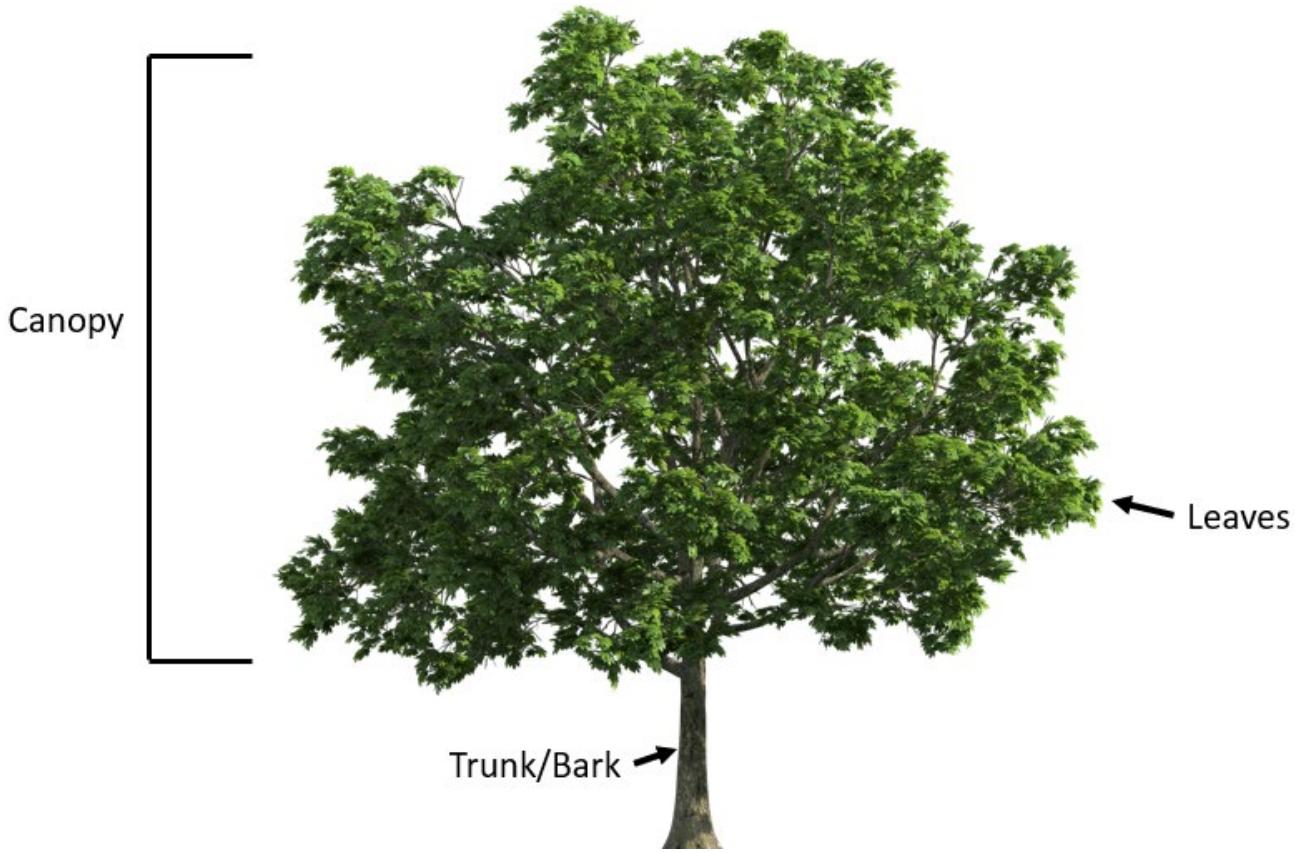
Why are street trees important?

Street trees provide many benefits to people. In the summer, their shade provides a cool place to rest. The green canopy of trees is lighter than the dark streets and buildings. Because they are a lighter color, they absorb less heat and help cool down the city. Street trees can also beautify an area and create more pleasant streets. Trees provide important habitat for wildlife. Their leaves, branches, bark, trunk, and even roots provide a great place for mammals, birds, insects, spiders, and even some reptiles to live!

Why identify a tree?

It's important to know the species or identification of a tree because that will provide clues for what it will look like in different seasons, what wildlife may live there, and what kind of care it needs. Ecologists, or scientists who study the environment, use many different characteristics to help identify trees.

Parts of a tree:



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Identify a street tree:

In this activity, you will choose a street tree to observe and eventually identify!

Directions:

Choose a street tree that is easily accessible and safe to observe.

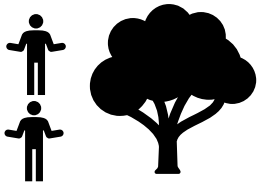
Follow the directions for each category below!

Height:

Height is important because some tree species only grow to certain heights. Determine how tall your tree is!

1. Stand next to your tree. Determine how many copies of *you* would have to stand on top of each other to reach the top:

   _____



2. Multiply your number above by your height in inches to get the height of your tree in inches: _____ inches

   If you are 50 inches tall and you think it would take two of you to get to the top of the tree then do: 50 inches x 2 = 100

3. Divide the height of your tree in inches by 12 to get the height of your tree in feet: _____ feet

   Using the previous example: 100 ÷ 12 = 8.33 feet

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Bark:

Create a bark rubbing! Place this or another piece of paper against the bark of your tree. Take a pencil or crayon and shade in the paper over the bark so you can see the pattern of the bark.

Describe what pattern you see. Is the bark smooth? Rough? What else do you notice about it?

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Flowers and Buds:

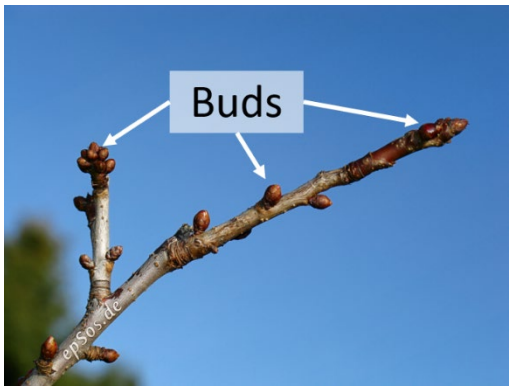
If your tree has flowers, draw one here. Pay attention to the details listed below!

How many petals do the flowers have? How big are the flowers? Do they grow in groups or singularly?

_____

_____

If your tree does not have flowers, draw the **buds**, or the place where a flower or leaf will grow, on your tree.



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Leaves:

Draw the leaves.

What shape is your leaf? What size is it? Does it have **toothed/serrated** edges? Or smooth edges?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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Draw your tree:

Now that you have a good idea of the parts that make up your tree, draw your entire tree!

What is your tree shaped like? Do the branches grow upwards, downwards, or to the side? Are there many small branches or a few large ones?

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Identify your tree:

Now that you have gathered all of your clues, you can try to identify your tree! There are three ways you can identify your tree:

Guide to Common Trees:

Check out the guide on our website to common trees on Randall's Island! Which tree does yours look like the most?

Street Tree Map:

Go online to https://tree-map.nycgovparks.org/. Find your tree on the map and click it to find out what the experts say!

Seek/iNaturalist Apps:

Check out our easy to use guides for the apps Seek and iNaturalist on our website! These apps allow you to take a picture and share it with other users who will help identify your tree!

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How to care for street trees in your neighborhood!

Water:

Street trees get thirsty too! Trees need 15 to 20 gallons of water every week!

Pick up litter:

Litter is bad for the tree and the wildlife using the tree. Pick up litter in the tree pit and carefully remove any that got tangled in the branches.

Mulch:

If you are able to and allowed to, mulching tree pits is a great way to help the tree get the water it needs. Mulch helps filter pollutants our of water and let the water slowly trickle into the ground for the tree roots to take up. But make sure not to pile the mulch against the trunk of the tree! This may trap water and cause rot.

Curb your dogs:

Dogs and dog waste (liquid and solid) may harm trees. The waste can harm a tree's trunk and add to much of certain chemicals, like nitrogen, into the ground. Make sure pets don't go into tree pits.