Identifying Tree Species

Five of the most common trees found in the Seattle area are described below along with the signs that you can use to identify them as you walk through the streets and neighborhoods of our beautiful city.

Douglas Fir

- Needles extend outwards
- Has a cone, with three-pronged bracts that slightly droop
- Thicker bark, helping protect this tree against fire
- Stronger wood, creating more value in construction

Western Red Cedar

- Strong but pleasant scent
- Fibrous bark
- Has scale like needle leaves
- Very resistant to rot due to resins in its bark and wood

Big Leaf Maple

- Leaves have a similar shape to your hands and can stretch 11" across
- Leaves turn yellow in autumn before they fall off adding to the colors of our beautiful PNW
- Winged seed pods twirl as they fall to the ground (I think we all played with these as a kid)

Red Alder

- Oval shaped serrated leaves

- Thinner, speckled bark

- Its flowers are called catkins, similar to cones on a pine tree

Western Hemlock

- Short needles

- State tree of Washington

- Small cones about the size of your thumbnail or slightly bigger

Every tree has two names. The first name is the "common name" that may vary from country to country or even state to state. The second name is a scientific "Latin name" that is the same all over the world, no matter what language is spoken. The Latin name has two parts: the first part is the g*enus*, or a general category of trees that share a lot of traits. The second part is the *species*, or the specific name of each individual tree. It is just like your first name and family name, but in reverse!

Tree Identification Apps

Two helpful tree-identification apps for your Smart Phone are the Virginia Tech Tree ID and LeafSnap.

Leafsnap is a free mobile app that uses visual recognition software to help identify tree species from photographs of their leaves.