

GITC Top 5

Because of a variety of environmental, ecological, and maintenance-related factors, the Green Isle Tree Committee (GITC) has developed a list of recommended trees for planting within the city. This list is intended to guide residents, developers, and city planners toward tree choices that will contribute to a healthy, diverse, and resilient urban forest. By focusing on native species well-suited to our region's conditions, the GITC aims to promote long-term sustainability, reduce the risk of disease and pest outbreaks, and support local wildlife and natural systems.

The GITC recommends five primary tree types—Maple, Oak, Hackberry, Walnut, and Locust—all of which include varieties native to Minnesota and have a proven track record in both rural and urban environments. Each type offers distinct benefits: Sugar Maple and Red Maple provide brilliant fall color and strong form, while White Oak and Bur Oak offer exceptional wildlife value and longevity. Hackberry is a tough, adaptable species that thrives in a wide range of conditions. Black Walnut contributes to biodiversity and offers both ecological and economic value. Honey Locust, with its open canopy and urban hardiness, is ideal for providing light shade and minimizing maintenance.

Certain species are intentionally excluded from the recommended list due to their known susceptibility to invasive pests and diseases. Ash trees, once widespread across the state, are now highly vulnerable to the emerald ash borer, which has caused extensive die-off throughout Minnesota. Likewise, Elms remain at risk from Dutch elm disease, which continues to affect both planted and wild populations. By avoiding these high-risk species and favoring resilient, native alternatives, Green Isle can better protect its urban forest from future threats and ensure that today's planting decisions serve the community for decades to come.

All information provided in this document is sourced from the Minnesota DNR. Their full list of native trees can be found here:

[Minnesota's native trees | Minnesota DNR](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trees/native-trees.html)

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trees/native-trees.html>

Maples

Black maple (*Acer nigrum*)



Click on the images help you identify an Black maple.



Form

Resembles sugar maple so closely that some botanists consider it a variety of the latter rather than a separate species. However, because it shows quite distinct characteristics, it can be considered a separate species. Although commonly smaller than the sugar maple, it can reach heights of 80' to 100' with a diameter of 24" to 36"; when grown in the open, it has a tall, dense, compact crown, but in the forest a tall trunk supports a shallow, flat-topped crown.

Bark

On young trunks and on branches, the bark is thin, smooth, and pale gray; on old trunks it is deeply furrowed and dark. Twigs are usually stouter than those of sugar maple and have conspicuous warty lenticels.

Leaf

Simple, opposite on stem, usually three lobed (a characteristic that further helps to distinguish this tree from sugar maple) with each lobe tapering to a slender point; smooth or wavy margins; drooping sides; dark green above, yellowish green below; yellow, orange, or deep red in autumn.

Fruit (seed)

Samara occurring in double-winged, U-shaped pairs; the wings, about an inch long, are slightly more divergent than those of sugar maple; a smooth, bright red brown seed is enclosed at the base of each wing.

Range

Southeastern and south-central Minnesota; shade tolerant, slow growing.

Wood uses

Similar to that of sugar maple and used for the same purposes, both woods being sold as hard maple; also used for the production of maple syrup and sugar; desirable as a shade or ornamental tree because of its dense foliage and fall coloring of bright yellow, orange, or scarlet.

Mountain maple (*Acer spicatum*)



Click on the images help you identify an Mountain maple.



Form

A small tree reaching a height of up to 20', sometimes even 25' to 30', with a diameter of 6" to 8"; short trunk supports an irregular crown of small upright branches; often occurs in dense, shrubby clumps.

Bark

Thin, reddish-brown, smooth or slightly furrowed.

Leaf

Simple, opposite on stem, length 2 1/2" to 4"; three-lobed or partially five-lobed, sometimes slightly heart-shaped at the base; gradually narrowed, pointed lobes are coarsely and sharply toothed; light green turning to deep red or orange in the autumn.

Fruit (seed)

Samara about 3/4" to 1" long occurring in double-winged, u-shaped pairs.

Range

Northeastern and east-central Minnesota; shade-tolerant, slow-growing.

Wood uses

Light, soft, close-grained; thick, lighter-colored sapwood; occasionally cultivated as an ornamental.

Red maple (*Acer rubrum*)



Click on the images help you identify an Red maple.



Form

Medium-size shade tree, height 40' to 65' with diameters of 10" to 24"; broad, round crown; moderately long, clear trunk.

Bark

Smooth, light gray on young stems, dark gray and rough on old limbs and trunk; old bark divided by shallow, flaky ridges at surface, making tree look shaggy.

Leaf

Simple, opposite on stem, length 2" to 4"; has three- to five-pointed saw toothed lobes separated by sharp angular openings; upper surface is light green when mature; lower surface is whitish and partly covered with pale down; first of the maples to turn brilliant shades of red, orange, and yellow in autumn. Winter buds are small, red, and somewhat rounded.

Fruit (seed)

Consists of U-shaped pairs of winged seeds (samaras), 1/2" to 1" in length, on long, drooping stems; red, reddish brown, or yellow; ripens in late spring or early summer.

Range

Distributed throughout the eastern half of the state as far south as Houston County and west to a line running south from Mahanomen to Redwood Falls; shade tolerant, moderately fast growing.

Wood uses

Heavy, close-grained, rather weak, light brown; used in the manufacture of cheap furniture, woodenware, and fuel; wood has little commercial value; the bark is sometimes used in dyeing. Shape and beautiful foliage colors make this an important ornamental tree.

Silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*)



Click on the images help you identify an Silver maple.



Form

Height 100' or more with a diameter of up to 36" or more; trunk usually short, divided into a number of long ascending limbs that are again divided and their small branches droop but turn upward at tips, forming a broad, rounded crown.

Bark

On young branches smooth and varying in color from reddish to a yellowish gray; on old branches dark gray and broken into long flakes or scales.

Leaf

Simple, opposite on stem, length 4" to 6"; three to five lobes ending in long points with toothed edges and separated by deep, angular openings; pale green on upper surface and silvery underneath; pale yellow to orange in autumn. Buds rounded and red or reddish brown.

Fruit (seed)

A pair of winged seeds (samaras), 1" to 2" long, on slender, flexible, threadlike stems about an inch in length.

Range

Common in southern Minnesota; scattered northward to the upper Mississippi River; moderately shade intolerant, fast growing.

Wood uses

Light brown, strong, fairly hard, even-textured, rather brittle, easily worked, decays readily when exposed to weather or soil; occasionally used for flooring, furniture, and fuel; often mixed with red maple for commercial purposes; extensively planted as a shade and ornamental tree.

Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*)



Click on the images to help you identify Sugar maple.



Form

Height 80' or more with a diameter of up to 24" or more; symmetrically rounded crown.

Bark

On young trees light gray to brown and somewhat smooth; on older trees gray to almost black with irregular plates or scales. Twigs are smooth and reddish-brown with sharp-pointed winter buds.

Leaf

Simple, opposite on stem, length 3" to 5"; three- to five- pointed, smooth-edged lobes; division between lobes rounded; dark green on upper surface, lighter green below; in autumn turns to brilliant shades of dark red, scarlet, orange, or yellow.

Fruit (seed)

Consists of two slightly connected wings (samaras), each containing one seed; length about 1"; easily carried by the wind.

Range

Grows in cool, rich locations in the eastern half of the state; very shade-tolerant, slow growing.

Wood uses

Light brown, hard, heavy, strong, close-grained; known commercially as hard or rock maple; used in the manufacture of flooring, furniture, shoe lasts, numerous small articles, maple syrup, maple sugar, and fuel; important for ornamental plantings.

Oaks

Black oak (Quercus velutina)



Click on the images help you identify an Black oak.



Form

Height 35' to 75' with a diameter of 9" to 30"; clear trunk for 20' or more on large trees; crown wide and irregularly shaped.

Bark

On young trees, smooth and dark brown; thick and black on older trees with deep furrowed and rough broken ridges; inner bark bright yellow and bitter because of tannic acid.

Leaf

Simple, alternate on stem, length 5" to 10"; lobed halfway to midrib with seven to nine triangular, bristle-pointed lobes; crimson in spring, silvery when half grown, brown in autumn; when mature, thick dark green and shiny on upper surface and pale on lower surface; covered more or less with down; conspicuous rusty brown hairs in forks of veins.

Fruit (seed)

Light brown nut (acorn) matures in the second season; length 1/2" to 1"; shape somewhat round; one-half to three-fourths of nut is enclosed in thin, dark brown, scaly cup; kernel is yellow and extremely bitter.

Range

Found in southeastern Minnesota on dry ridges; moderately shade intolerant, moderately fast growing.

Wood uses

Hard, heavy, strong, coarse-grained, not tough, bright reddish-brown with thin outer edge of paler sapwood; principally used for fuel; tannin and yellow dye made from bark.

Bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*)



Click on the images help you identify an Bur oak.



Form

Height 80' or more under favorable conditions with a diameter of 36" to 48" or more; under unfavorable conditions not over 15' in height with gnarled branches covered with corky tissues; in dense forests trunk is straight with short branches; however, tree usually has a broad top of heavy spreading branches and a relatively short body.

Bark

Thick, deeply furrowed on surface with irregular platelike broken scales often slightly tinged with red. Image shows a harmless fungus causes outer bark to slough.

Leaf

Simple, alternate on stem, length 6" to 12"; crowded at ends of twigs; has pair of deep indentations near base and wavy notches on broad middle and upper portions; shiny, dark green turning yellow or brown in autumn.

Fruit (seed)

Acorn set deeply or almost enclosed in a fringed cup; diameter may reach 1" or more, however, it varies widely in respect to size and the degree to which the nut is enclosed in the mossy fringed cup; seed is bitter.

Range

One of the most common trees in Minnesota, extending far out on the prairies in the western part of the state; usually grows singly in open stands and in fields; requires moist, well-drained soil; easily propagated but grows slowly; moderately shade tolerant.

Wood uses

Heavy, hard, strong, tough, durable, rich brown; used for furniture, interior finish, flooring, structural material, and railroad ties.

Chinkapin oak (Quercus muehlenbergii Engelm)



Click on the images help you identify an Chinkapin oak.



Form

Height can reach 80' to 100' with a diameter of 36" (the average size of Minnesota trees is often smaller than this, however); open-grown trees have short trunks with many branches that form a wide, well-rounded crown; forest-grown trees are tall with narrow crowns.

Bark

Thin, light gray; on old trunks it is broken on the surface into thin, loose, silvery white flakes.

Leaf

Simple, alternate on stem, 4" to 7" long; crowded at the ends of the branches, leaves taper gradually toward the tip and have coarsely pointed teeth; upper surface smooth and yellow green, lower surface pale downy; turns red or brownish orange in autumn.

Fruit (seed)

Stemless or short-stemmed acorn, usually less than 3/4" long; occurs singly or in pairs; enclosed for one-half or less of its length in a rather shallow bowl-shaped cup.

Range

Native to Houston County.

Wood uses

Close-grained, heavy, hard, strong; is not commercially valuable but is sometimes used for railroad ties, construction timbers, and bridge planking.

Northern pin oak (*Quercus ellipsoidalis*)



Click on the images help you identify an Northern pin oak.



Form

Height 40' to 65' with a diameter of 24" or occasionally larger; trunk tapers rapidly; branches droop at ends forming a narrow, open crown.

Bark

Rather smooth, divided by shallow fissures into irregular ridges and plates; grayish to dark brown, inner bark reddish.

Leaf

Simple, alternate on stem, length 3" to 6"; somewhat oblong or oval; usually has seven lobes, each one bristle-pointed and separated by rounded openings cut nearly to the midrib, giving the leaf a very deeply cut or lacy appearance; bright red and hairy in early spring, turning green later, and a bright scarlet in autumn.

Fruit (seed)

Bitter acorn that takes two years to mature; length 1/2" to 1"; reddish-brown, about half enclosed in its cup.

Range

Usually grows on dry ridges in the southeastern part of the state and as far north as Cass Lake, except on limestone soils; not abundant in Minnesota; shade intolerant, moderately fast growing.

Wood uses

Heavy, hard, strong, coarse-grained, reddish-brown; used mostly for fuel and as an ornamental tree; easily grown from seed.

Northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*)



Click on the images help you identify an Northern red oak.



Form

Height 55' to 80' with diameters ranging from 24" to 36"; tall and straight with clear trunk and narrow crown.

Bark

On young stems, smooth, dark gray to dark brown; on older trees, thick and brown, broken by shallow fissures into regular, flat, smooth-surfaced vertical plates.

Leaf

Simple, alternate on stem, length 5" to 9"; divided into seven to nine lobes, each extending halfway to the midrib; each lobe somewhat coarsely toothed, bristle tipped, firm; dull green above, paler below, often turning a brilliant red in fall. Buds thick and pointed at top.

Fruit (seed)

Large, bitter acorn, maturing the second year; length 3/4" to nearly 2"; blunt topped, flat at base with base enclosed in a very shallow, dark brown cup. Acorns are an important winter food source for squirrels, deer, wild turkeys, and several songbirds.

Range

Grows throughout the state, but is most common and of best quality in the rich soil of southern, central, and southeastern Minnesota; moderately shade tolerant, fast growing. Very susceptible to oak wilt fungus.

Wood uses

Light, reddish-brown, hard, strong, and coarse; used for construction and finish of houses, furniture, and fuel; grows more rapidly than most oaks, so production is widely encouraged in the southern parts of the state for both timber and shade.

Swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*)



Click on the images help you identify an Swamp white oak.



Form

Height may reach 65' with a diameter of up to 36"; narrow, rounded top, open crown; the upper trunk is often fringed with short drooping branches.

Bark

Thick, deeply and irregularly divided by fissures into broad ridges; grayish brown; bark on twigs ragged and often peeling.

Leaf

Simple, alternate on stem, length 5" to 6"; often crowded toward ends of twigs; broad at middle (pear shaped) and wedge shaped at base; wavy and indented along margins; dark green and shiny above, grayish and fuzzy beneath; turns brown in autumn.

Fruit (seed)

Nut or acorn, length about 1"; enclosed for about one-third of its length in a thick, narrow cup; usually in pairs on slender dark brown stalks that are 2" to 4" long.

Range

Common in river bottoms in the extreme southeastern corner of the state and in the southern part of the Minnesota River Valley; rarely grows as far north as St. Paul; requires moist soil as name implies; moderately shade tolerant, slow growing.

Wood uses

Light brown, hard, strong, tough, and durable; used for railway ties, barrels, mine timbers, furniture, flooring, and other interior finish.

White oak (Quercus alba)



Click on the images help you identify an White oak.



Form

Height 60' to 80' with a diameter of 24" to 36", although it can grow larger; tall and narrow-crowned in the forest; short in the open, crowned by a broad, rounded top with limbs spreading irregularly; well-grown specimens are strikingly beautiful.

Bark

Pale gray with scaly ridges and shallow fissures.

Leaf

Simple, alternate on stem, length 5" to 9" and about half as broad; crowded toward ends of twigs, deeply divided into five to nine fingerlike lobes; young leaf yellow or red while unfolding, later becoming light green above and much paler below; turns red or brown in autumn; sometimes remains on tree most of the winter.

Fruit (seed)

A light brown acorn maturing the first year, length 3/4" to 1", about one-fourth of it is enclosed in a bowl-shaped cap. A valuable fall food source for many wildlife species.

Range

Abundant in southeastern Minnesota as far north as the Twin Cities, often forming woodlands almost to the exclusion of other trees; less abundant northward to Mille Lacs and northwestward to the vicinity of St. Cloud; absent from the northern and western parts of the state; grows on heavy, well-drained acid soil; slow growing; difficult to transplant after passing seedling state. A fine permanent tree that should be planted wherever there is available space and the soil is suitable.

Wood uses

Light brown, hard, durable; one of our most useful woods for heavy construction; used for ships, railway ties, interior finish, furniture, and fuel.

HackBerry

Hackberry (Celtis occidentalis)



Click on the images help you identify an Hackberry.



Form

Height 40' to 75', diameter 10" to 36"; limbs often crooked and angular; tree head made up of slender, hanging branches or short, bristly, stubby twigs when growing in the forest; in the open, crown is generally symmetrical.

Bark

Grayish brown, much roughened with prominent, short, corky ridges.

Leaf

Simple, alternate on stem, length 2" to 4"; has long narrow, tapering points and sharply toothed margins; uneven at base; prominent veins; hairy on upper side; turns yellow in autumn.

Fruit (seed)

Berrylike drupe, 1/4" to 1/3" in diameter; thin, purplish skin, sweet yellowish flesh; sometimes called sugar berry; ripens in September; frequently hangs on tree most of winter, providing an important food supply for several wildlife species.

Range

Found sparingly in the southern part of the state and in the western part northward through the Red River Valley; naturally found in flood plains but will grow on various types of soil from the poorest to the richest; never found in pure forest stands; moderately shade tolerant, moderately fast growing.

Wood uses

Heavy, rather soft, weak, coarse-grained, fairly durable in contact with soil, light yellow or greenish-brown with narrow white sapwood; used in the manufacture of cheap furniture, fuel, and only occasionally for lumber. It is a good shade tree and is often used in ornamental plantings.

Walnut

Black walnut (*Juglans nigra*)



you identify a Black walnut.

Click on the images to help



Form

Height 50' to 60' but often reaching 100' with a diameter up to 36"; straight and clear of branches for half its heights; when grown in the open, stem short, crown broad and spreading.

Bark

Thick and very dark brown, divided by rather deep fissures into round ridges.

Leaf

Alternate on a stem, length 12" to 24", pinnately compound with 14 to 22 yellow-green, sharply pointed leaflets, tapered at the ends and toothed along the margins; smooth above, pale and hairy underneath; yellowish-green turning yellow in autumn.

Fruit (seed)

A large, round nut borne single or in pairs and enclosed in a solid green husk that is not sticky and down not spread open even after the nut is ripe. The nut is black with a tough, thick, finely ridged shell enclosing a rich, oily kernel that is edible and highly nutritious; it matures in the fall.

Range

Grows on rich bottomlands and moist, fertile hillsides in the southern part of the state; is easily propagated from nuts and grows rapidly in good soil; shade-intolerant.

Wood uses

Rich chocolate-brown heartwood is of superior quality and value; heavy, hard, strong, and comparatively free from warping and checking; takes a high polish and is very durable; highly prized for a great variety of uses such as furniture, gun stocks, and airplane propellers; finest veneers are made from burls and roots; small trees consist mainly of sapwood that is light-colored and not durable. Roots produce a natural herbicide that is toxic to many plants.

Locust

Honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*)



Click on the images help you identify an Honey locust.



Form

Medium-sized tree, height 30' to 50' (taller under very favorable conditions), may reach a diameter of up to 16"; slender, spreading, somewhat drooping branches form a broad, open, rather flat-topped head that resembles a great green plume; trunk often divided near the ground.

Bark

Dark gray or brown on old trees; divided into thin, tight scales; strong, brown, straight, sharp, shiny thorns appear on one-year-old wood and remain for many years.

Leaf

Alternate on stem, 6" to 8" long, doubly compound (featherlike) with 18 to 28 small egg-shaped leaflets that have finely toothed margins; dark green and lustrous above and dull yellow-green below, turning yellow in the autumn.

Fruit (seed)

A pod, length 10" to 18"; flat dark brown or black when ripe, containing seeds and yellow whitish pulp; pod often becomes twisted as seeds ripen; seeds are hard and each is separated from the others by the pulp; pods are eaten by many animals.

Range

Occurs in scattered stands or as individual trees, especially in southern Minnesota in counties along the Root River Valley and Mississippi bottomlands; found in forested areas, but is more common in disturbed and barren areas beside roads and fields; shade intolerant, fast growing.

Wood uses

Reddish-brown, coarse-grained, hard, strong, not durable in contact with ground; however, it is used for fence posts, cross ties, and fuel; has been planted to some extent for windbreaks and hedges in southern Minnesota; not a hardy tree; sprouts readily from the root.