

# Whose Bark is That?

All Ages

Tree bark, at first glance looks the same from tree to tree. However, a closer look reveals all sorts of textures, patterns, and various colours. The features of a tree's bark can help you identify it without ever looking at the leaves or needles. Winter is a great time to observe and compare tree bark.

Visit places with mature trees when studying bark. Most young trees have smooth bark which changes as the trees age. You might start with sorting the trees by features. Give them your own labels such as Flakey tree, Wrinkly tree, or Pinky tree. Or dive right in and learn their proper names. Either way, here are a few ideas to get you started and some common features to look for.

## Tree Tag

As soon as you can recognize one tree by its bark, you are ready to play tree tag. The rules are so simple and easy to apply, you can play anytime. Begin in an area with a few different types of mature trees. The leader calls out the name of a familiar tree in the area (or a bark feature). Everyone dashes about to touch a tree by that name or with the sought after feature. If you only know one tree, for example Wrinkly, you can alternate calling 'Wrinkly' and 'Not Wrinkly'. Add more trees as you learn them. If the group is large and number of trees small, allow more than one person to touch the same tree. Take turns as leader. Perhaps, the person who shares a fact or story about the tree is the new leader. Once everyone understands tree tag, it can be a game you play on any outing. Remember to give the trees a hug and thank them for playing along.



## Make up Memory Joggers



Create hints to help you remember which tree is which. Sometimes the appearance of the bark is so different from other trees it is easy to remember. For example, the bark of the Wild Cherry is very black and looks like burnt cornflakes. Occasionally a fact about the tree is useful. Wooden baseball bats are made from Ash trees. Baseball is played on a diamond. The furrows of the Ash bark form diamond-like shapes.



**Be gentle.** Bark protects the living layer of the tree trunk where the sap flows. Damaging the bark injures the tree just as cuts harm people. Some trees, like Beech, never recover and are scarred forever.

For more tree activities, see *Trees, Glorious Trees, Neighbourhood Tree Guide*, and *Evergreens Everywhere*





# Bark

(Check each box when you find the tree)

## Smooth, Unbroken Bark

A few species keep their smooth bark throughout their life. The American Beech and the Red Maple have smooth bark even as large mature trees.

## Peeling in Horizontal Strips

Sometimes you'll notice that a tree has smooth bark, but it is peeling around the trunk in thin paper-like layers. Birch trees are an example of this type of bark.

## Peeling in Vertical Strips

Shredded, hairy-looking bark in vertical strips is often used by animals for nesting material. Red Cedars have this type of bark.

## Scales and Plates

Some trees have breaks in their bark that looks like scales or plates. Many pine and spruce trees have scale-like bark.

## Ridges and Furrows

Many trees have very rough bark, with ridges and furrows. Some species, like White Ash, have fine ridges and furrows which intersect. Others, like oak have long vertical furrows, while Sugar Maples have wide vertical ridges with horizontal breaks.

## There's More!

Notice the colours, from light to dark grays, hues of brown, or black. Each tree species is different. Some bark is quite fragrant, use all your senses to explore!



Yellow Birch

☐

Found One!



Cedar

☐

Found One!



White Ash

☐

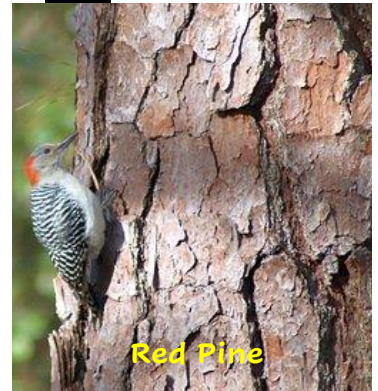
Found One!



American Beech

☐

Found One!



Red Pine

☐

Found One!



Wild Cherry

☐

Found One!



Red Oak

☐

Found One!



Sugar Maple

☐

Found



Black Walnut

☐

Found One!



Shagbark Hickory

☐

Found One!