



Five Fall Leaves to Get to Know this Autumn

(c) Bethany Peck, 2024
@beautiful_purpose_writing

Dear Friend,

Thanks for downloading my “Five Fall Leaves to Get to Know this Autumn” guide!

Why did I create this? I’m a big believer in nature - what I mean is that, I’ve seen the positive impact of nature on my own life, mentally, physically, and spiritually. So I’m somewhat of a nature-evangelist, you might say! But aside from my endorsement, research continues to report on the health benefits of nature, particularly in this day and age, when screens and technology are such a dominant force in our lives.

One way to grow a deeper connection with nature is to learn more about it! That’s what this guide seeks to do - spread nature literacy by helping you learn to identify 5 common leaves based on their fall appearance (mostly applicable to the eastern/southeast/midwest U.S.). Hopefully you can experience the joy of autumn with the beautiful, changing colors in a new way this fall by learning the leaves!

My hope is that this guide is also a springboard to more nature exploration. If you want to learn more about the health benefits of nature, check out bethanypeck.org for more resources. Nature is also powerful for spiritual growth as well. By exercising stillness, solitude, noticing, and even wonder, we can slow down for time to connect with God. Whether alone, or with others, nature affords the opportunity for connection and discovery - and sometimes that happens most poignantly within.

A final concluding note - this is not about knowledge for the sake of knowing. It’s about learning, connection, health, and my deepest hope - for others to experience healing and peace in God through nature, too.

Happy autumn leaf-hunting!


Your nature friend,



Bethany



@beautiful_purpose_writing



*“I’m so glad I
live in a world
where there are
Octobers.”*

- Anne of Green Gables • L.M. Montgomery



@beautiful_purpose_writing

Contents, Terms, Resources

- 5 How to Use this Guide
- 6 Sassafras
- 8 Sweetgum
- 10 Sycamore
- 12 Tuliptree
- 14 Scarlet Oak
- 16 A Prayer for Leaf-Hunting
- 17 Thank you!

Deciduous - trees or shrubs that lose their leaves annually.

Lobes - sections of a leaf blade that can be sharp or rounded.

Veins - channels for nourishment of the leaf, from the stem to the leaf. There's usually a primary vein and secondary veins that branch from it.

Resources:

- National Audubon Society: Field Guide to Trees, Eastern Region
- Otter Point Creek: A Visitor's Guide (local research guide from the Anita C. Leight Estuary Center)
- USDA TreeSearch
- University of Maryland Extension



How to Use this Guide

This is really for YOU, to learn a new way to connect with nature by learning to identify a few fall leaves. Whether you're an adult looking to practice your own powers of observation while on a hike, or you're a parent wanting your children to grow in nature literacy, I hope you'll find this helpful!

My hope is that this is a “reconnection prescription.” With yourself, with nature, and with God. To practice this guide requires:

- slowing down to take time for a nature walk.
- putting your phone away to immerse yourself in nature.
- practicing your skills of observation - noticing colors, shapes, and texture.
- naming what you know for a closer connection with nature.
- rediscovering the awe and wonder of childhood.

An important note is that this is a simple guide. There is a lot more complex information about leaf and tree identification available! Go check out these many wonderful resources to learn more widely about these trees!

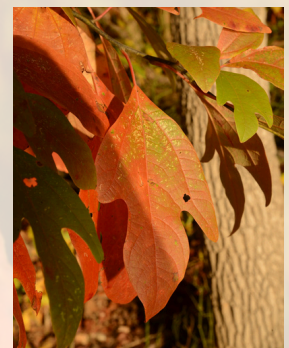
Sassafras

Sassafras albidum

Sassafras

Sassafras albidum

- Sassafras is such a cool tree with its unique leaves!
- What to look for:
 - Shape:
 - The sassafras is special with 3 different leaves of 1, 2, or 3 lobes.
 - The 1-lobe leaf is oval-shaped, the 2-lobed leaf looks like a mitten, while the 3-lobed leaf resembles a trident.
 - Color
 - Turning from a bright green to vibrant shades of red, orange, or yellow.
 - Size
 - midsize, 5 inches, with 1 main vein.
 - Texture
 - While still green, they can be soft and even fuzzy, turning to a matte-like texture as they turn colors.
- Other notes:
 - Sassafras trees are native trees found from southwestern Maine stretching south to central Florida; west to East Texas, and north to central Michigan.
 - Habitat: the sassafras likes moist, sandy soil of uplands and valleys.
 - The sassafras is an aromatic tree, and oil extracted from its bark is used in soaps and perfumes. Breathe in deeply when you find one!



Sweetgum

Liquidambar styraciflua



Sweetgum

Liquidambar styraciflua

- The sweetgum has some of the most vibrant, varied fall leaves.
- What to look for:
 - Shape:
 - Star shaped
 - 5-7 long and wide, saw-toothed lobes
 - Color
 - shiny, dark green turning varied shades of scarlet, deep orange, yellow and even a mixture within one leaf
 - Size
 - midsize, 3-6 inches, with 5 main veins
 - Texture
 - Matte-like with sawtooth edges
- Other notes:
 - The sweetgum is a deciduous hardwood, native to the mid-Atlantic through the southwest.
 - The sweetgum fruit is a 1 inch spiked green ball hanging from stalks. As it matures in autumn, it turns brown and cracks open to release seeds.
 - Habitat: you'll find the sweetgum within valleys and lower slopes with moist soil, and in mixed forests.
 - The sweetgum even has a pleasant aroma! Try crushing a leaf in your hand to notice.



Sycamore

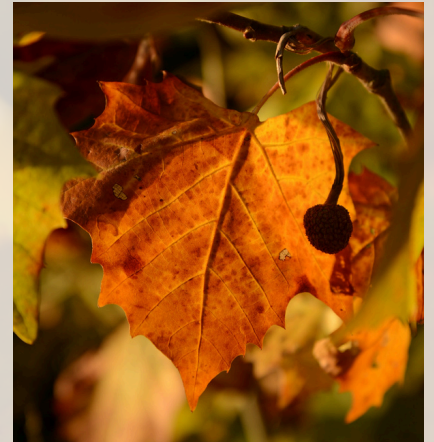
Platanus occidentalis



Sycamore

Platanus occidentalis

- The sycamore is such a cool tree!
- These may not be the flashiest fall leaves, but they're distinct.
- What to look for:
 - Shape:
 - 3 large lobes with a sharp point to the end of the leaf
 - 1 - 2 smaller lobes
 - Color
 - medium to dark brown
 - (bright green before fall!)
 - Size
 - these leaves can be huge, with 3 or 5 main veins
 - Texture
 - You can feel how shiny the sycamore leaves are!
- Other notes:
 - The sycamore is a large, deciduous tree with a massive trunk.
 - You'll find sycamores throughout the eastern US and into the Midwest - it's one of the largest eastern hardwoods.
 - The sycamore seed is 1 brown ball hanging from a long stalk, maturing in autumn - you'll notice once the leaves fall.
 - Habitat: floodplains, mixed forests, shores of rivers and wetlands.
 - The sycamore's bark is distinct too with - smooth, whitish and mottled, peeling off in large flakes to reveal patches of brown, green, and gray.



Tuliptree

Liriodendron tulipifera



Tuliptree

Liriodendron tulipifera

- Also referred to as “tulip poplar,” you’ll notice the distinct yellow leaves as some of the first to change late in the summer.
- What to look for:
 - Shape:
 - uniquely-shaped leaves with 1 large, two-pronged lobe in the center, and 1 lobe on each side.
 - You may even think the outline of the leaf resembles the shape of a fox’s head viewed face-on!
 - Color
 - golden yellow, often with brown splotches
 - Size
 - long and wide, about 3-6 inches
 - Texture
 - Shiny and smooth
- Other notes:
 - The tuliptree is one of the tallest eastern hardwoods.
 - You’ll find tuliptrees throughout the eastern US, south to North Florida, west to Louisiana, and north to Michigan.
 - You’ll also want to look for the tuliptree’s flower in springtime, a cup-shaped flower with green petals.
 - Habitat: moist, well-drained soils such as in valleys and slopes.
 - Because of their long straight trunks, pioneers would hollow out a single tulip poplar trunk to make a lightweight canoe.



Scarlet Oak

Quercus coccinea

Scarlet Oak

Quercus coccinea

- There are a plethora of different oak varieties, but this guide focuses on the scarlet oak, known for its brilliant scarlet red fall foliage.
- What to look for:
 - Shape:
 - long with widely spreading lobes (7-9) with toothed tips
 - Color
 - shiny green turning scarlet in fall
 - Size
 - 3-7 inches long
 - Texture
 - Slightly shiny
- Other notes:
 - The scarlet oak is an attractive and popular tree, stretching from SW Maine to Georgia, west to NE Mississippi and north to Michigan.
 - The scarlet oak (like most oak trees) produces acorns as seeds; these are 1 inch egg shaped.
 - Habitat: various soil types, especially sandy on upland ridges and slopes, and with other oaks in mixed forests.
 - Again, there are many different oak varieties, several with similar shape to the scarlet oak, and most with acorns, but you'll know the scarlet oak from it's distinct autumn color!





A Prayer for Leaf Hunting

May the colors of this season
with their deep and vibrant hues
spark a warm and lasting awe,
finding refuge in their beauty.
And the rhythm of this season,
may it welcome you to trust
that though the leaves will fall
there's reason in the process.
Walk the woods this autumn,
breathe deeply of decay,
find the colors falling
on the forest floor today,
slow down to notice all of it,
God's grace in your life too,
your body is a precious gift,
so let your soul renew.

- Bethany Peck

@beautiful_purpose_writing

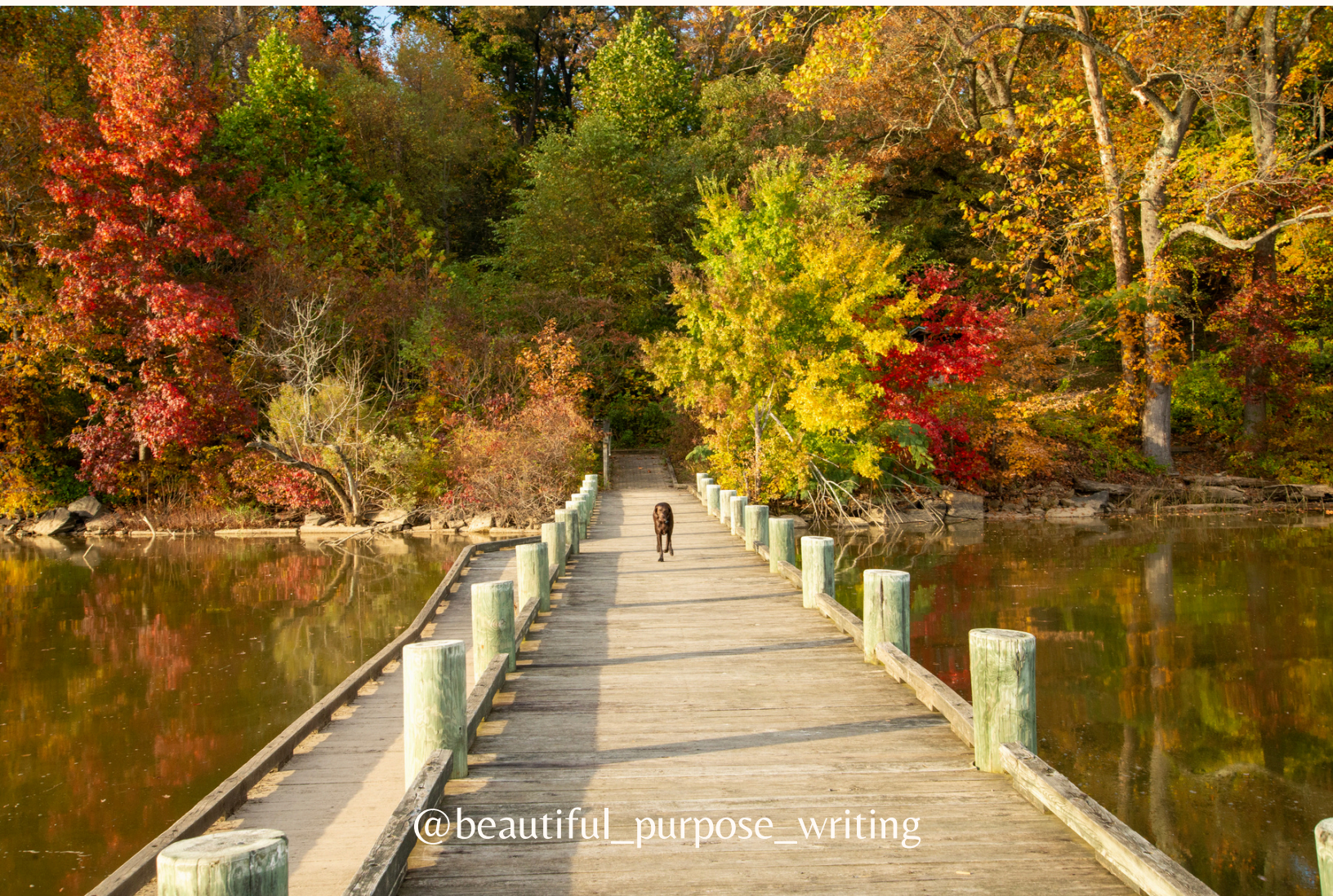
Thank you for downloading this guide!

Hi! I'm Bethany, and I write about faith, grief, and hope, and I want to encourage you to find healing and peace in God through nature. You can find me writing on Instagram at [@beautiful_purpose_writing](#), on my website [bethanypeck.org](#), and on my Substack, "Wildflowers in the Wilderness."

Thank you for downloading my guide, "Five Fall Leaves to Get to Know this Autumn." I'd love to hear your thoughts - you can email me at bethany1027@gmail.com. I hope this is a helpful guide for you to connect with nature, yourself, and God this fall.



Bethany



[@beautiful_purpose_writing](#)



*“I am like an olive tree flourishing
in the house of God; I trust in God’s
unfailing love for ever and ever.”*

Psalm 52:8

Happy leaf-hunting!



@beautiful_purpose_writing
(C) Bethany Peck, Beautiful Purpose Writing, 2024