

# BARE IS BEAUTIFUL

The wintertime may leave deciduous trees looking stark and lifeless, but there's actually quite a bit to notice about them at this time of year! In this guide we'll take a closer look at aspects of trees that aren't as easy to appreciate when leaves are grabbing the limelight.

## Branches are Beautiful

This time of year is a great time to look at branches. With leaves gone, we have a much clearer view of the shape, color and patterns that woody plants create in their branches.

For example, the Yellow-twigged Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) (1) lives up to its common name in the winter. Its branches turn a bright, almost neon yellow. Tatarian dogwood shrubs (*Cornus alba*) (2) are also striking in that their twigs are a bright, blood-red color. Interestingly, this red coloration appears only during the [winter; in the spring, chlorophyll production resumes and turns the stems brownish green again.

This is also a great time to notice how trees branch. Notice the baldcypress trees (*Taxodium distichum*) (3), with one central trunk and many lateral branches. This is called 'excurrent' branching, as opposed to the 'decurent' branching of most deciduous trees, like ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) (4) and pin oak (*Quercus palustris*) (5). Decurrent trees have trunks split into many boughs, and create a much less orderly appearance when they're bare.



Excurrent tree.

Decurrent tree.

Incidentally, if you'd like to see a particularly interesting branching style, find the "Henry Lauder's Walking Stick" shrub (*Corylus avellana* var. *contorta*) (6). Its branches twist and curl into a tangle as a result of a genetic mutation. Henry Lauder was a popular Scottish entertainer during the early 1900s who used a crooked walking stick, hence the name.

Also notice how the branches of trees belonging to a given species tend to create a distinct crown shape. Trees are called 'pyramidal' if their crowns are roughly triangular (as in most conifers), 'columnar' if their crowns are tall and straight, 'vase-shaped' if their branches spread upward, or 'globular' if they're more or less round.

## Bark is Beautiful

The bark of sycamores and birches are striking enough to draw attention at any time of year, but have you ever noticed the patchy mosaic pattern that Chinese elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*) (7) bark makes? Or the interesting "cross-hatching" that covers the trunk of a pumpkin ash (*Fraxinus profunda*) (8)?

Take a walk past the mother-and-child statue and check out the Osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*) (9) that grows there. The bark is so thick that it appears to be dripping like melted wax. Or check out the difference between the Sassafras bark (*Sassafras albidum*) (10) on the saplings in the Mausoleum garden and the century-old Sassafras trees near the garden's entrance by Tower Grove House.



Bark can also tell some interesting stories. If you head into the Lehmann Rose Garden and head north toward the path, you'll find a tulip tree (*Liriodendron* sp.) (11) sporting a curious pattern of holes in horizontal lines all up its trunk. These holes were probably created by a yellow-bellied sapsucker, a member of the woodpecker family notorious for boring lines of holes into bark to drink tree sap. This particular tree was apparently a particular favorite at some point.



## Berries are Beautiful

Most berries have been eaten or have fallen off by late winter, but fortunately some do linger. Those that do are cherished among gardeners for the splash of color they create against the otherwise drab backdrop of winter.

The Coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*) (12) is a good example. Its cheerful coral-pink berries form in clusters along its branches in the fall and linger through the entire winter. The berries aren't edible, but they do make pretty additions to any



Juniper 'berries'

winter garden.

Many junipers (*Juniperus* spp.) (13) also produce 'berries' through the winter. These pretty gray-blue 'fruits' are not true berries, but are in fact unusual cones with fleshy scales. They are nonetheless attractive, and useful besides. The berries of some species taste great with poultry, and they're also used to flavor gin.

Be sure to visit the various holly bushes (*Ilex* spp.) (14) around the garden as you walk and look for the characteristic red berries they produce. You may want to point out that hollies are dioecious, with separate male and female plants. Only female hollies produce berries, so encourage your students to try and identify the genders of the plants in the Garden by noting which bear fruit and which do not.

## Buds are Beautiful



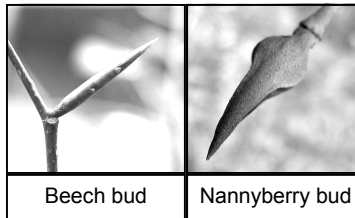
Magnolia bud

Buds are among the most fascinating of woody plant features. They are as varied as leaves and just as important, as these little nubs represent the places where new branches and

flowers will appear in the spring. Sadly, their relatively small size usually makes it hard for them to grab much attention, so this is a great time of year to give them the appreciation they deserve.

Magnolia buds (*Magnolia* spp.) (15), for example, are especially charming. The terminal 'teddy bear'

buds are unusually large and fuzzy. They will open into the characteristic showy white flowers that make the Magnolia Walk a must-see in the spring.



Beech bud

Nannyberry bud

Beech (*Fagus* spp.) (16) buds are long and sharp, and they almost resemble thorns. The buds of the Nannyberry bush (*Viburnum lentago*) (17) look similarly ominous, even clawlike. However, neither is actually

firm enough to hurt.

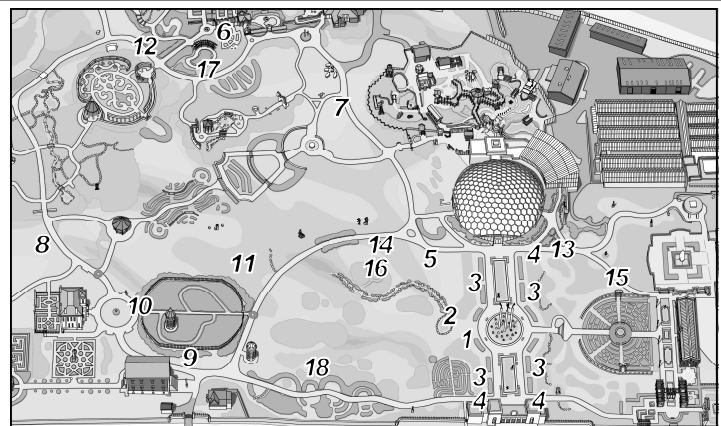
Corkwood shrubs (*Leitneria floridana*) (18) offer a great opportunity to see buds with bright colors and interesting scales. The buds resemble small pine cones and may be bright red, yellow or orange.



Corkwood bud

## Where is it?

All of the plants mentioned above can be found in the Garden! Just locate the number on the map at the right.



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MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

