

LOOK AGAIN !

There are a lot fewer trees with leaves that grow opposite each other rather than alternately. In fact, there is a little mnemonic to help us keep track of the four major ones: MAD BUCK, which is an acronym of Maple, Ash and Dogwood plus an abbreviation of Buckeye. (In regions where Horse Chestnuts outnumber Buckeyes, MAD HORSE serves just as well.)

There would seem to be no chance of confusing these four genera. Dogwoods and Maples both have simple leaves, but in one they are ovate and in the other they are conspicuously lobed. The rest are compound, those of Ash being pinnate in the arrangement of their leaflets, while Buckeye and Horse Chestnut leaves are palmate.



ACER NEGUNDO

This would work if it were not for the non-conformist Acer negundo, a tree that bears the appropriate though unimaginative common name of Ash-leaved Maple as well as one which could hardly be more incongruous, Box Elder. Here we have a Maple with opposite, pinnately-compound leaves that suggest White Ash (Fraxinus americana), which is the principal representative of its genus in our area--except for some convenient differences. White Ash leaves usually have seven leaflets instead of only three or five, and they are entire or nearly so, whereas those of Acer negundo have coarse, irregular teeth and sometimes even shallow lobes. In addition, mature specimens can attain twice the height of Ash-leaved Maples.



FRAXINUS AMERICANA

Maples and Ashes are easy to distinguish when in blossom, but the flowering season is very brief, while the seed vessels, or samaras, can be observed over a much longer period. Those of Acer negundo are typical of the Maples, and consist of twin divergent "wings" each containing a large seed. In the case of Fraxinus americana, they are single and much narrower, shaped somewhat like canoe paddles.

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