



Urban tree survey: how to take part

The aim of the urban tree survey is to locate, identify and count trees in streets, parks and gardens across the UK.

This guide takes you through the survey process and makes it easy for you to collect and give us information that is useful for scientific research.

Your survey area

Before you go out, think about:

- where you are going to do your survey
- how many trees you might survey
- how you want to record their positions within the area

This will help you to prepare and make the most of your time.

Identifying each tree

Although not always easy, the process of identification is actually quite straightforward.

What is a tree?

The first thing to do is make sure you are looking at a tree rather than a shrub.

For this survey, a good working definition is:

- a tree has a clearly defined trunk that branches over 2 metres above ground level
- a shrub has an ill-defined trunk and branches at or just above ground level

Of course there are exceptions: trees that have several trunks, or even no trunk at all, and shrubs that grow larger than some trees and have thick, well-defined trunks.

Identifying your tree

The identification key will help you to identify the groups and species of tree we think you're most likely to come across.

You can print a version of the identification key to take with you and make an identification when you are standing beside each tree.

You can then use the interactive identification key when you're back online. To do this you will need to:

- take a photo of the tree and of a typical twig with leaves or flowers
- collect a specimen twig with leaves or flowers, or
- make a sketch of a typical twig with leaves or flowers

If you are unsure of a tree's identity, you can ask the Museum's experts in the NaturePlus tree ID forum (you will need to log on to NaturePlus to do this).

You can also use one of the alternative guides recommended by the Museum's scientists:

- Trees of Britain and Europe (Collins Wildlife Trust Guides) by Keith D Rushforth.
ISBN: 978 0 002 20013 4
- Photographic Guide to the Trees of Britain and Europe. ISBN: 978 1 845 17187 2
- New Flora of the British Isles by Clive Stace.
ISBN: 978 0 521 70772 5
- Green Guide to Trees of Britain and Europe by J R Press (author), Colin Emberson (illustrator)
ISBN: 978 1 859 74927 2

Can't identify a tree?

If you find a tree that you can't identify, please don't guess what it is. You could try using alternative guides or discuss the tree you've found in the NaturePlus tree ID forum.

Scientists want to know about new tree species in new places. Among other things this will help them learn which non-native species are being introduced where. It can also give them information about climate change, for example if trees from warmer areas are surviving in colder ones, or the other way round.

The survey form

Print the survey form and take it with you so you can record information about each tree while you're looking at it. When you get back, enter that information in the online survey form.

For each tree, we need to know:

- where it is - make a note or sketch of tree locations when you are out so you can pinpoint them on the survey map when you're back online
- the date you surveyed the tree
- the type of place where the tree is - road/street, park, public garden, private garden or other
- the group or species the tree belongs to, using the identification key or other reference guide

We would also like to know:

- the girth of its trunk 1.5 metres above the ground (approximately shoulder height)
- an estimate of its height (one way to work out a tree's height is to ask someone to stand next to it, then estimate how many times they would fit into the tree's height)
- if it was in flower or not on the date of the survey
- if it was in fruit or not on the date of the survey

Tree locations

You will need to know where the trees you survey are located so you can mark them on the online map when you submit your results. The map shows satellite images of the UK at a zoom level close enough to see and mark individual trees. Making a note of buildings and other nearby landmarks will help you give accurate locations.

You can enter all the other information about each tree on the survey form, and you can print out as many of these as you need.

Photos

If you'd like to send us photos of the trees you have surveyed (for example, of the whole tree or of its twigs, leaves or flowers) you can upload them using the online survey form. These images can then help other people identify trees.

Photographs will be moderated before being shown on the website.

Survey check list

You will need to take the following with you:

- the identification key
- a survey form for each tree you want to record
- something to write with

These will also be useful, if you have them:

- a tape measure, or piece of string and a ruler
- some paper or plastic bags to collect any leaves, flowers or twigs you might need to bring back to check identifications
- a camera, preferably digital, or a mobile phone with a camera
- a global positioning system (GPS) device – which may be your phone or camera