Tree identification key

Identification keys are used to identify specimens. This key is made up of a master key and 7 other keys.

How to use this key
• start at step 1 in the master key
• compare your specimens to the statements at each step
• keep following the instructions until you reach the name of a tree

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<td>Key 7:</td>
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<td>pages 25–26</td>
</tr>
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Master key: types of tree found in gardens and urban areas

Master key – step 1
Leaves needle-like or scale-like and often overlapping

Master key – step 2
Leaves in pairs, opposite each other on shoots

Leaves alternate on shoots

Master key – step 3
Leaves divided into separate leaflets

Leaves with one blade, possibly indented into lobes, but not divided into leaflets

Master key – step 4
Leaves evergreen

Leaves deciduous
Master key – step 5

Fruits fleshy or juicy ➤➤➤ go to key 5 (page 15)

Fruits dry ➤➤➤ go to key 6 (page 20)

Key 1: trees with leaves that are needle-like or scale-like

Key 1 – step 1

All leaves scale-like, usually pressed against the twig ➤➤➤ go to step 2

All leaves needle-like, usually spread widely apart ➤➤➤ go to step 6

Some leaves scale-like, others needle-like ➤➤➤ go to step 14

Key 1 – step 2

Scale-leaves at least 30mm long, rigid and sharp-edged ➤➤➤ Monkey puzzle

Scale-leaves less than 30mm long, not rigid or sharp ➤➤➤ go to step 3
### Key 1 – step 3
- Deciduous tree; foliage is wispy; pink or white flowers
  - **Tamarisks**

### Key 1 – step 4
- Evergreen tree with cones; foliage is dense
  - **go to step 4**

### Key 1 – step 4
- Cone is egg-shaped with overlapping scales, eventually wide-spreading like petals of a flower; crushed foliage smells of pineapple
  - **Western red cedar**

### Key 1 – step 5
- Cone is egg-shaped with more than 15 scales; bark is very thick, with visible fibres, and is rather soft or spongy
  - **Wellingtonia**

### Key 1 – step 5
- Cone is ball-shaped, with fewer than 10 scales; bark is hard
  - **Cypresses**

### Key 1 – step 6
- Needles are in two flat, parallel rows, at least on the short shoots growing off longer ones; fruit is scarlet and berry-like
  - **Yew**

### Key 1 – step 6
- All the needles are in clusters or are parted on either side of shoot, but not in flat rows; fruit is a woody cone
  - **go to step 7**
| Key 1 – step 7 | Needles are all on their own at their position on the shoot | go to step 8 |
| | Most needles grouped around the shoot, in pairs or bundles of 2 or more | go to step 10 |
| Key 1 – step 8 | Cones stand upright on branches; needles are attached by a sucker-like base | Firs |
| | Cones hang downwards from branches; the base of the needles are not sucker-like | go to step 9 |
| Key 1 – step 9 | Needles leave behind their peg-like bases after falling | Spruces |
| | Needles leave behind their cushion-like bases after falling | Hemlock spruces |
| Key 1 – step 10 | Most needles are in bundles of 2–5 | go to step 11 |
| | Most needles are arranged around the shoot in clusters of 3, 10 or more, rarely in pairs | go to step 12 |
### Key 1 – step 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needles in bundles of 2</th>
<th><img src="image" alt="Needles in bundles of 2" /></th>
<th>Pines, 2-needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needles in bundles of 3</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Needles in bundles of 3" /></td>
<td>Pines, 3-needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needles in bundles of 5</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Needles in bundles of 5" /></td>
<td>Pines, 5-needed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 1 – step 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needles on all shoots are arranged in rings of 3 going around the shoot, or occasionally in pairs</th>
<th><img src="image" alt="Needles on all shoots" /></th>
<th>Junipers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needles on short shoots, in clusters of 10 or more</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Needles on short shoots" /></td>
<td>go to step 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 1 – step 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A deciduous tree; the cones are egg-shaped</th>
<th><img src="image" alt="A deciduous tree" /></th>
<th>Larches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An evergreen tree; the cones are barrel-shaped</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="An evergreen tree" /></td>
<td>Cedars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key 1 – step 14

Leaves of main shoots are scale-like, leaves of short shoots are needle-like, up to 20mm long, arranged in 2 rows; foliage doesn’t smell unpleasant

Leaves mostly scale-like; those towards the tips of shoots are needle-like, in opposite pairs, 5–6mm long; crushed foliage smells unpleasant

Key 2: trees with broad leaves, arranged opposite each other in pairs

Key 2 – step 1

Leaves palmately divided into separate leaflets, the leaflets extending from the leaf stalk

Leaves pinnately divided into separate leaflets, the leaflets in two rows on the stalk

Leaves are sometimes lobed, but are not divided into leaflets

Key 2 – step 2

Small trees with ridged, corky bark; the fruit is a berry

Tall trees with smooth or slightly wrinkled bark; fruits are dry and wing-shaped

Coast redwood

Junipers

Horse chestnuts

go to step 2

go to step 5

Elder

go to step 3
### Key 2 – step 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Twigs are clearly flattened where the buds or leaves are attached; leaves are hairy on the underside; 1 fruit per stalk</th>
<th>go to step 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twigs are not flattened where the buds or leaves are attached; leaves are hairless on the underside; fruits in pairs on the stalks</td>
<td>Ashleaf maple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 2 – step 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flowers have no petals; winter buds are black</th>
<th>Ash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flowers have narrow white petals; winter buds are grey or brown</td>
<td>Manna ash</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 2 – step 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaves are deeply palmately lobed; fruits are wing-shaped and in pairs</th>
<th>go to step 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaves are not lobed or are only very shallowly lobed; fruit is either a woody capsule, a berry or a long, narrow pod</td>
<td>go to step 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 2 – step 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaf edges are toothed</th>
<th>Spindles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaf edges are not toothed</td>
<td>go to step 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key 2 – step 7
An evergreen tree, leaves are usually bluish-green and smell of eucalyptus when crushed; bark is usually shredding or flaking

Eucalyptus

A deciduous tree, leaves are pale or bright green and don’t smell when crushed; bark is not shredding

go to step 8

Key 2 – step 8
A tall tree up to 20m; leaves are 10–25cm long; flowers are 5cm or more across; fruit is a long, narrow pod that remains after the leaves fall

Indian bean tree

A small tree to 8m; leaves are 4–10cm long; flowers are 4mm across; fruit is a red berry

Cornelian cherry

Key 2 – step 9
Leaves with 3-13 lobes. If 5-lobed, then any teeth present aren’t small, coarse, round-tipped and numerous, or flowers/fruits don’t hang in tails

Maples (other than sycamore)

Leaves 5-lobed with many small, coarse, round-tipped teeth; flowers/fruits in hanging tails

Sycamore
Key 3: trees with leaves arranged alternately, divided into separate leaflets

Key 3 – step 1

Leaves divided into 3 leaflets

Laburnums

Leaves divided into more than 3 leaflets

go to step 2

Key 3 – step 2

Twigs are thick and densely covered with velvety hairs; flower heads (and later the seed heads) are dense, cone-shaped and hairy

Stag’s horn sumach

Twigs not velvety; flowers and fruits are not in hairy, cone-shaped heads

go to step 3

Key 3 – step 3

Twigs have a pair of thorns at the base of each leaf

False acacia

Twigs have no spines or thorns

go to step 4
Key 3 – step 4

Twigs have distinctive Y-shaped scars where leaves have fallen; cut twigs leak latex; flowers are in catkins or clusters of 1–5


Leaf scars are not Y-shaped; cut twigs don’t leak latex; flowers are numerous and in clusters.


go to step 5

Key 3 – step 5

Leaflets are not lobed, they are not foul-smelling; the fruit is a pod


Leaflets have a few teeth or lobes in the lower half only and they are foul-smelling when crushed; the fruit is a papery, winged seed


Leaflets are toothed or lobed, not foul-smelling; the fruit is a papery capsule


Leaflets are toothed at least in the upper half and are not foul-smelling; fruit is juicy and berry-like


go to step 6

Key 3 – step 6

Lower part of the leaf is divided into 1–4 pairs of leaflets, the upper part is lobed in places but not completely divided


Leaves are completely divided into 6 or more pairs of leaflets


go to step 7
Key 3 – step 7

Ripe fruits are orange-red to vermillion-red or occasionally yellow, with yellow pulp

Rowans with orange or vermillion fruit

Ripe fruits are white to pink or crimson, with white pulp

Rowan with white, pink or crimson fruit

Key 4: evergreen trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets

Key 4 – step 1

Leaves have spiny edges

Go to step 2

Leaves sometimes have toothed edges but are not spiny

Go to step 3

Key 4 – step 2

Leaves are white- or green-felted on the underside; fruit is an acorn; flowers are green, the male flowers are in slender catkins

Evergreen oak

Leaves are paler but hairless on the underside; fruit is a berry; flowers are white and in small clusters

Hollies
Key 4 – step 3

Leaves are aromatic when crushed ▶▶▶ go to step 4

Leaves are not aromatic when crushed ▶▶▶ go to step 5

Key 4 – step 4

Leaves smell of eucalyptus when crushed, or rarely of lemon, the edges are flat ▶▶▶ Eucalyptus

Leaves smell of almonds when crushed; the edges are rolled under ▶▶▶ Cherry laurel

Leaves smell of bay when crushed, the edges are wavy ▶▶▶ Bay

Key 4 – step 5

Leaves are densely covered with rusty brown or grey hairs on the underside ▶▶▶ go to step 6

Leaves are hairless or have white hairs on the underside ▶▶▶ go to step 7
### Key 4 – step 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flowers are on their own</th>
<th>Evergreen magnolias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flowers are in clusters</td>
<td>Rhododendrons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 4 – step 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flowers are roughly 1cm long, urn-shaped and in small drooping clusters; the fruit is a warty, matt-red berry</th>
<th>Strawberry tree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flowers are 3–5.5cm long, bell-shaped and in large rounded clusters; the fruit is a capsule</td>
<td>Rhododendrons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers are 1–1.5cm across and flat, with up to 100 in erect spikes; the fruit is a smooth, shiny black berry</td>
<td>Portugal laurel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers are less than 1cm across, flat and in clusters; the fruit is a red, orange or blue-black berry</td>
<td>Cotoneasters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key 5: deciduous trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets; fruits fleshy or juicy

Key 5 – step 1
Leaves are fan-shaped with a central notch ➤ ➤ ➤ Maidenhair tree

Leaves are not fan-shaped ➤ ➤ go to step 2

Key 5 – step 2
At least some leaves are lobed ➤ ➤ go to step 3

Leaves are undivided, the edges may be toothed but not lobed ➤ ➤ go to step 6

Key 5 – step 3
Leaves are palmately lobed, distinctly bristly to the touch on the upper side ➤ ➤ go to step 4

Leaves are pinnately lobed, smooth or softly hairy on the upper side ➤ ➤ go to step 5
### Key 5 – step 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some leaves are lobed and all are toothed; the fruit resembles a raspberry, red or purple when ripe</th>
<th>Mulberry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All leaves are lobed; the fruit is pear-shaped and brownish purple when ripe</td>
<td>Fig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 5 – step 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Twigs are thorny</th>
<th>Hawthorns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twigs are not thorny</td>
<td>Whitebeams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 5 – step 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaves are not toothed</th>
<th>Cotoneasters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaves are toothed</td>
<td>go to step 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 5 – step 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flowers and fruits are in cylinder- or cone-shaped spikes</th>
<th>go to step 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flowers and fruits are on their own, in pairs or in clusters</td>
<td>go to step 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key 5 – step 8

Flowers are less than 10mm in diameter, the petals are broadly oval; the fruit is smooth at the apex

- - - Bird cherries

Flowers are more than 10mm in diameter, the petals are narrow and strap-shaped; the fruit is crowned with the withered sepals

- - - Amelanchier

Key 5 – step 9

Flowers have 1 style; sepals are absent on the ripe fruit; 1 seed

- - - go to step 10

Flowers have 2 or more styles; sepals are usually present on the ripe fruit; 2 or more seeds

- - - go to step 14

Key 5 – step 10

Twigs are very thorny

- - - Blackthorn

Twigs are not thorny or have only occasional thorns

- - - go to step 11
**Key 5 – step 11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit is less than 2cm long; the bark often has distinctive horizontal bands of pores</th>
<th>go to key 7 (page 25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit is more than 2cm long; the bark doesn’t have horizontal bands of pores</th>
<th>go to step 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Key 5 – step 12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit has a velvety skin, even when fully ripe</th>
<th>Peach and almond</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit has a smooth skin, often with a greyish waxy bloom on the skin</th>
<th>go to step 13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Key 5 – step 13**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Young twigs are green, smooth and glossy</th>
<th>Cherry plum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Young twigs are brown or grey, dull and often hairy | Plum |
### Key 5 – step 14
Flowers and fruits in clusters of 11 or more, with their stalks not arising from a central point

Flowers and fruits in clusters of 10 or fewer, with their stalks all arising from a central point

### Key 5 – step 15
Twigs are thorny or spiny, sometimes with very few spines

Twigs are not thorny

### Key 5 – step 16
Fruit is usually pear-shaped, with gritty flesh; styles are not joined together at the base

Fruit is usually apple-shaped, the flesh is not gritty; styles are joined together at the base

### Key 5 – step 17
Fruits less than 4cm long

Fruits more than 4cm long

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Twigs are thorny or spiny, sometimes with very few spines</th>
<th>Cockspur-thorns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twigs are not thorny</td>
<td>Whitebeams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit is usually pear-shaped, with gritty flesh; styles are not joined together at the base</td>
<td>Pears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit is usually apple-shaped, the flesh is not gritty; styles are joined together at the base</td>
<td>go to step 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits less than 4cm long</td>
<td>Crab apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits more than 4cm long</td>
<td>Apples</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key 6: deciduous trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets; fruits dry

Key 6 – step 1

Leaves are lobed ➔ go to step 2

Leaves are not lobed ➔ go to step 6

Key 6 – step 2

Leaves are square or notched at the tip; the flowers are up to 5cm long and are on their own

Tulip tree

Leaves are rounded or pointed at the tip; the flowers are much smaller, in clusters or catkins ➔ go to step 3

Key 6 – step 3

Leaves are pinnately lobed; the fruit is an acorn ➔ Oaks

Leaves are palmately or irregularly lobed; the fruits form a catkin or globe-shaped head ➔ go to step 4
Key 6 – step 4
Leaves are felted with white or grey hairs on the underside  
>>>  White poplar

Leaves are smooth or sparsely hairy on the underside  
>>>  go to step 5

Key 6 – step 5
Bark is flaking in large patches; the fruits form a soft, hairy ball like a pom-pom  
>>>  Plane

Bark is fissured, not flaking; the fruits form a stiff, spiky ball like the head of a mace  
>>>  Sweet-gum

Key 6 – step 6
Bark is silver or white  
>>>  go to step 7

Bark is greyish or brown  
>>>  go to step 8

Key 6 – step 7
Tree is weeping, the twigs and smaller branches hang loosely; the bark has black, diamond-shaped splits  
>>>  Silver birch

Tree is not weeping; the bark is often peeling but doesn’t have black diamond-shaped splits  
>>>  White or Himalayan birch
Key 6 – step 8

Leaves are more than 3 times as long as they are wide

Leaves are less than 3 times as long as they are wide

Key 6 – step 9

Leaf edges are coarsely toothed, the teeth end in a softly spiny tip; the seeds are enclosed in a softly spiny husk

Sweet chestnut

Leaf edges are not indented but may have small, fine teeth; the seeds have a plume of silky hairs at one end

Key 6 – step 10

Tree is weeping, the smaller branches hang downwards, often almost to the ground

Weeping willow

Tree is not weeping

Willows
### Key 6 – step 11

Fruit is a small, woody cone, they are numerous and stay on the tree until spring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

---

Fruit is not a woody cone

| go to step 12 |

---

### Key 6 – step 12

Leaf edges aren’t indented

| go to step 13 |

---

Leaf edges are toothed, the teeth may be very small

| go to step 15 |

---

Leaves are double-toothed

| go to step 16 |

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### Key 6 – step 13

Leaves are almost circular; flowers are pea-like and found on the trunk and main branches as well as the twigs

| Judas tree |

---

Leaves are oval or egg-shaped; flowers aren’t pea-like

| go to step 14 |
### Key 6 – step 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaves are flat and 15cm or more in length; the flowers have 5 or more large petals that are white or pink; the fruit is cone-like but not woody</th>
<th>Magnolias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaves are up to 9cm long with wavy edges; the flowers are greenish and don’t have petals; the fruit has a spiny husk</td>
<td>Beech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 6 – step 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flowers and fruits are in clusters suspended beneath an oblong, wing-shaped bract; the leaves are roughly heart-shaped</th>
<th>Limes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flowers and fruits are in cylindrical catkins; the leaves are oval to oblong</td>
<td>Willows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 6 – step 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flowers are in small clusters; the fruit is a seed surrounded by a papery wing</th>
<th>Elms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flowers are in slender, hanging catkins; the fruit is a nut</td>
<td>go to step 17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 6 – step 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaves hairy on both surfaces; fruits are solitary or in clusters of a few; each nut is wrapped in a leafy sheath</th>
<th>Hazels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaves hairy only on veins on the underside; fruits are in a hanging catkin, paired nuts are attached to a large, 3-lobed bract</td>
<td>Hornbeam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key 7: cherry trees

Key 7 – step 1

Flowers or fruits arranged in roughly cylinder-shaped spikes, 11 or more per spike  go to step 2

Flowers or fruits on their own or in clusters of 10 or fewer  go to step 3

Key 7 – step 2

Leaves hairless or with white hairs along midrib, sometimes only where veins join; flowers 10-15mm across  go to Bird cherries

Leaves have rusty or orange hairs underneath, each side of the midrib; flowers 8mm across  go to Rum cherry

Key 7 – step 3

Flower and leaf stalks densely hairy; leaf edges have pointed teeth  go to step 4

Flower and leaf stalks hairless or almost hairless; leaf edges have pointed teeth, often with thin, bristle-like tips  go to step 5

Flower and leaf stalks hairless; leaf edges have blunt or round teeth, often with a claw-shaped gland at the tip  go to step 6
### Key 7 – step 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sepal edges are toothed; leaves hairless on the upper side with hairy veins on the underside</th>
<th>Spring cherries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sepal edges not toothed; leaves hairy on both surfaces</td>
<td>Fuji cherry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 7 – step 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bark on trunk and branches very glossy, purplish-brown and peeling in thin, copper-brown strips</th>
<th>Tibetan cherry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bark mostly dull grey or brown, sometimes peeling to reveal shiny red-brown on the trunk</td>
<td>Japanese cherries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 7 – step 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flowers less than 20mm across, on stalks up to 15mm long, not arising from a central point; fruit less than 10mm long</th>
<th>St Lucie cherries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flowers more than 20mm across, on stalks more than 15mm long, arising from a central point; fruit more than 10mm long</td>
<td>go to step 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key 7 – step 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flowers cup-shaped; leaves dull on the upper side, sparsely hairy on the underside</th>
<th>Wild cherry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flowers saucer-shaped; leaves glossy on the upper side, hairless on the underside</td>
<td>Morello cherry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key 1: Trees with leaves that are needle-like or scale-like
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Key 2: Trees with broad leaves, arranged opposite each other in pairs
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Key 3: Trees with leaves arranged alternately, divided into separate leaflets
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Key 4: Evergreen trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets
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Key 5: Deciduous trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets; fruits fleshy or juicy
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Key 6: Deciduous trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets; fruits dry
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Key 7: Cherry trees

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