

Spanning the Gap

Tree I.D.



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The winter landscape provides us with a good test for our tree identification skills. Sometimes a tree can be identified by its silhouette alone. The shape of the individual limbs, and the pattern they make as they branch away from the trunk usually form a particular outline that is generally the same for all trees of the same species. Many environmental factors, however, also determine the shape of a tree, sometimes changing its silhouette. Trees growing within a forest are squeezed into a tall shape with a small flattened crown, and few branches anywhere except near the top. Those growing on the edge of a wooded area reach into the open space for sunlight, and develop a leaning trunk with most of the branches on one side. Trees grown in open areas will often have the purest form of all, but even there, wind can influence their posture.

Luckily every tree gives us other clues to help us identify it. Using a good field guide for reference, take a careful look at the texture and color of the bark, the branching pattern of the individual limbs and twigs, and the shape of any fallen seeds or dead leaves. This will often reveal the true identity of a tree, even in mid-winter. Here are three trees found throughout the park, but especially near Millbrook Village:





The familiar **apple tree** is recognized by its short trunk and spreading, rounded crown. The twigs are short and often wooly, and the bark is scaly and grayish brown.



The **sugar maple** is a large graceful tree whose bark has rough vertical ridges. In very early spring, its sap is tapped for maple sugar.



The **gray birch** often has several trunks growing together in one spot. Its twigs are slender, and its bark is chalky, but does not peel like some other birches.



(Above, top to bottom) Apple tree, sugar maple, gray birch.