Adopted August 2007

University of Minnesota Extension

# Ash Tree Identification

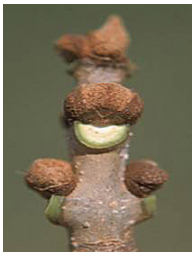
Ash species attacked by emerald ash borer include green (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), white (*F. americana*), black (*F. nigra*), and blue (*F. quadrangulata*), as well as horticultural cultivars of these species. Green and white ash are the most commonly found ash species in the Midwest with blue ash being rare.

While other woody plants, such as mountainash and pricklyash, have "ash" in their name, they are not true ash, or *Fraxinus* species. Only true ash are susceptible to attack by emerald ash borer.

## To properly identify ash trees, use the following criteria:

### Branch and Bud Arrangement

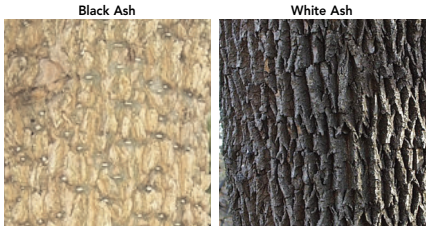
Branches and buds are directly across from each other and not staggered. When looking for opposite branching in trees, please consider that buds or limbs may die; hence not every single branch will have an opposite mate.



Diane Brown-Rytlewski

### Leaves

Leaves are compound and composed of 5-11 leaflets. Leaflet margins may be smooth or toothed. The only other oppositely branched tree with compound leaves is boxelder (*Acer negundo*), which almost always has three to five leaflets. White ash (on left) and green ash (on right)




forester401 *Paul Wray, Iowa State University

### Bark

On mature trees (left), the bark is tight with a distinct pattern of diamond-shaped ridges. On young trees (right), bark is relatively smooth.

Identifying ash trees by their bark is difficult. Use this in combination with other indicators.

*Paul Wray, Iowa State University

### Seeds

When present on trees, seeds are dry, oar-shaped samaras. They usually occur in clusters and typically hang on the tree until late fall, early winter.

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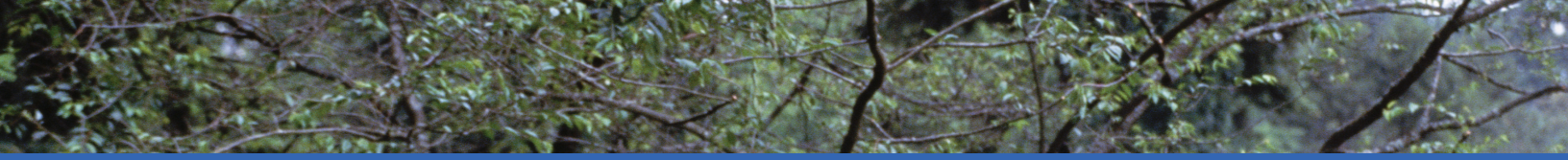
Emerald Ash Borer

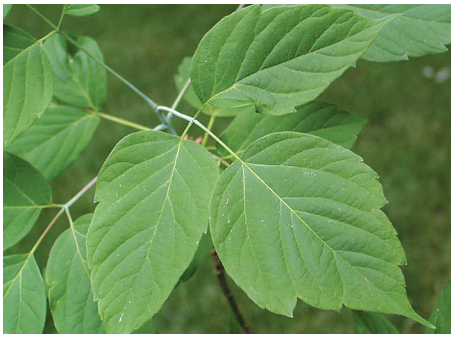




# Tree Species Resembling Ash

## Boxelder *(Acer negundo)*

Exhibits opposite branching and compound leaves. However, has 3 to 5 leaflets (instead of 5 to 11) and the samaras are always in pairs instead of single like the ash.



*Paul Wray, Iowa State University

*Bill Cook, Michigan State University

## European Mountainash *(Sorbus aucuparia)*

Leaves are compound with alternate (staggered) branching. Tree bears clusters of creamy white flowers in May. Fruits are fleshy, red-orange berries.

Diane Brown-Rytlewski

*Boris Hrasovec, University of Zagreb

## Shagbark Hickory *(Carya ovata)*

Leaves are compound with 5 to 7 leaflets, but the plant has an alternate branching habit. Fruit are hard-shelled nuts in a green husk.

*Paul Wray, Iowa State University

*Paul Wray, Iowa State University

## Elm *(Ulmus species)*

Branching is alternate and the leaves are simple with an unequal leaf base.

*Paul Wray, Iowa State University

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## Black Walnut *(Juglans nigra)*

Leaves are compound with 9 to 15 leaflets, but the plant has an alternate branching habit. Fruit is a large dark brown nut inside a green husk.

*Paul Wray, Iowa State University

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*www.forestryimages.org

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