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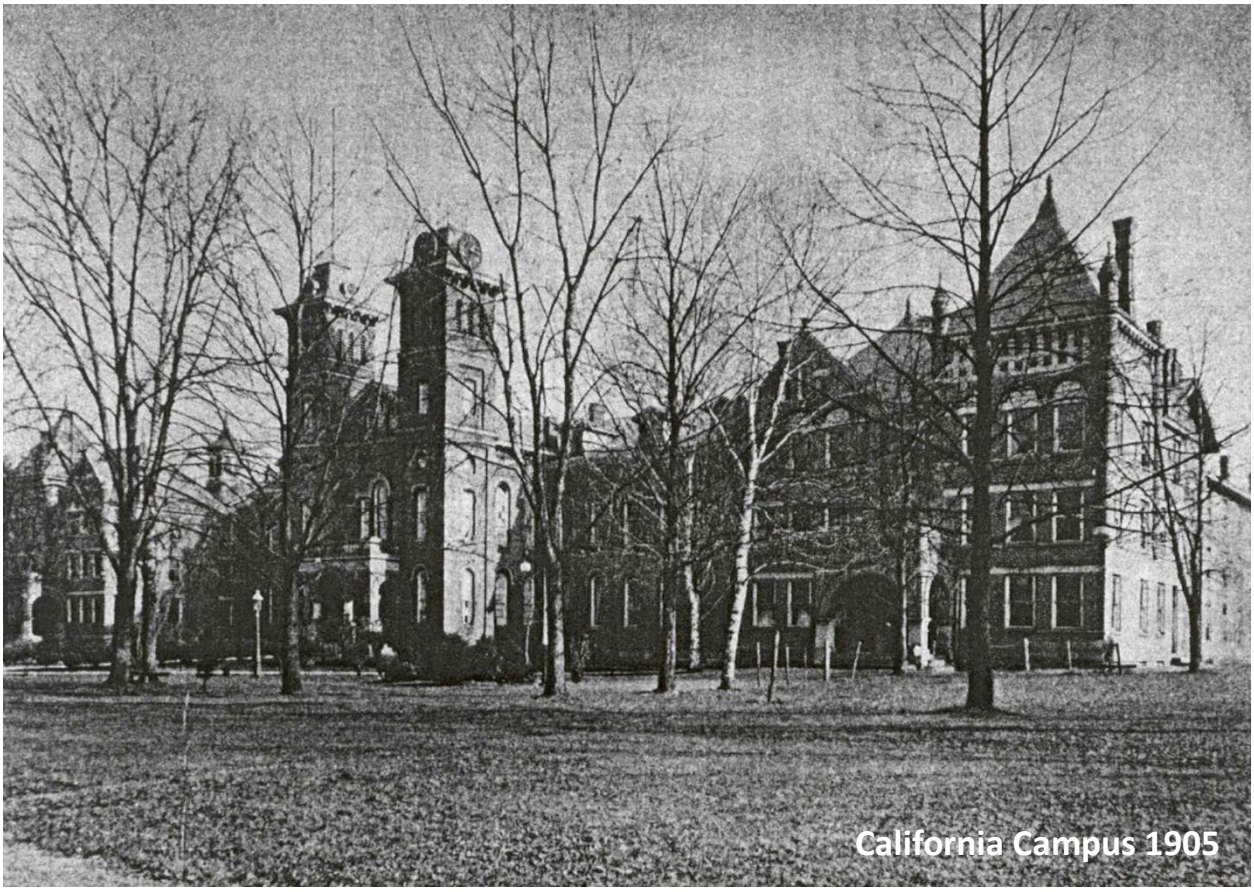
Trees of PennWest California: A Campus Guide

A walking guide to notable trees across campus



California Campus 1905

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Foreword

This booklet offers an inviting, self-guided tour of notable trees across PennWest California. It is meant to help anyone visiting campus learn more about these trees and to connect with the natural beauty that surrounds us every day.

Trees are important for our environment - they support ecosystems, help with gas exchange, improve air quality, and provide habitat for wildlife. The trees around campus do all of this, but they also make our university a more beautiful and inviting place. Each one helps define a part of the campus. From the short stature and drooping leaves of the Pawpaw in front of Noss Hall to the historic American Sycamore outside Herron Hall, every tree has something unique to offer.

With the help of the campus map provided in this booklet, the information in these pages can guide anyone who wants to learn more about these trees or simply explore the campus in a new way. Step onto campus with this booklet in hand and enjoy your tour!

This booklet was created by students in the Dendrology Course at PennWest California, who spent the semester learning to identify trees and using the campus as their outdoor classroom.

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How to Use This Guide

As you explore this booklet, each tree species is presented with a photograph and a companion page of information. The tree's common name appears in bold at the top of the page, with its scientific name in italics below. Each entry includes key details such as habitat, campus notes, and interesting facts to help you appreciate the species you encounter.

You'll also find a campus tree map that provides a suggested walking route highlighting notable trees across Pennsylvania Western University's California Campus. Each numbered location on the map corresponds to a specific tree species. On the individual tree pages, you will find this same number next to the species name. Simply match the numbers to learn more about any tree you discover along the way.

Below is a key to the icons used throughout the guide. These icons help you quickly identify important characteristics:

- Conifer – A gymnosperm with needle-like leaves that bears cones.
- Broadleaf – A tree with broad, flat, thin leaves.
- Pennsylvania Native (Keystone symbol) – Indicates the tree is native to Pennsylvania.
- Non-native (Keystone with a "no" symbol) – Indicates the species is not native.
- Historic (Book symbol) – Marks trees of historical interest on campus.

Use these icons and the map together to help you navigate campus, identify species, and discover the stories behind some of our most remarkable trees.

				
Conifer	Broadleaf	Pennsylvania Native	Non-native	Historic

Map

1. American Elm	5. River Birch	9. Weeping Willow	13. Pawpaw
2. Dawn Redwood	6. Bald Cypress	10. Tulip Tree	
3. Red Maple	7. Northern Catalpa	11. Pin Oak	
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American Elm 1

Ulmus americana

A classic American street tree, once lost to disease, now returning with quiet resilience

Habitat
Found across eastern and central North America, the American elm once dominated city streets, parks, and college campuses. It thrives in rich, moist soils and along waterways.

Size & Form
A large shade tree growing 60–80 feet tall, sometimes over 100 feet. Its signature vase-shaped form—tall trunk that opens into a wide, arching crown—once created green, cathedral-like tunnels over entire neighborhoods.

Campus Note
The PennWest California campus has two American elms, believed to be the disease-resistant 'Princeton' cultivar. Developed in the 1920s and widely planted after the Dutch elm disease crisis, 'Princeton' elms retain the classic vase-shaped form while showing strong resistance to the fungus. These individuals represent both history and hope—a modern effort to restore one of America's most iconic trees.

Description
American Elm leaves are oval-shaped and doubly toothed. The base of the leaf is asymmetrical, as one side of the leaf is distinctively lower down on the petiole than the other side. The fruit is a flat samara with white pubescence along the margins. The samaras typically hang together in clusters. The bark is gray and possesses thick, uneven ridges.

Did You Know?
- One of the most iconic street trees in U.S. history.
- George Washington planted elms at Mount Vernon.
- Before the 1950s, American elms shaped the identity of towns and campuses across the country. Dutch elm disease swept through North America mid-century, killing the majority of mature trees. Any healthy American elm today is a survivor of a nearly lost landscape.
- 'Princeton' is one of the most successful disease-resistant selections.
The 'Princeton' elms on campus add resilience as well as beauty, linking today's PennWest California landscape to the elm-lined communities of the past.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature considers the American Elm to be an endangered species.

Dawn Redwood 2

Metasequoia glyptostroboides

A tree once known only from fossils, rediscovered and brought back to life

Habitat
Native to central China, dawn redwoods were once thought to be extinct until living trees were discovered in the 1940s.

Size & Form
A fast-growing deciduous conifer reaching 70–100 feet tall. Feathery, opposite needles turn brilliant copper-orange in fall before dropping, surprising many visitors who expect a “pine-like” tree to stay evergreen.

Campus Note
The PennWest California campus has several dawn redwoods, well known for their vibrant copper-orange fall foliage. Each autumn, they glow in shades of copper, orange, and russet, making them some of the most admired and photographed trees on campus. Dawn redwoods add beauty and interest throughout the year. Their graceful shape, soft foliage, and seasonal color changes make them a favorite stop for visitors exploring the campus.

Description
Leaves of the Dawn redwood are soft and flat. The branchlets appear in an opposite arrangement along the twigs. The feathery foliage is light green in the spring months, turning a beautiful red-bronze color in autumn. The elongated cone is 0.5-1 inches in length and is connected to the twig by a long stalk. The reddish-brown bark is stringy, and the trunk is fluted at the base.

Did You Know?
- One of only a few conifers that drop their needles each year.
- A close relative of the coast redwood and giant sequoia.
- Students often call it “the tree that came back from the dead.”
- Known originally only from fossils, the dawn redwood became a scientific sensation when living trees were found in a remote valley in China. Seeds were later distributed worldwide, and many campus trees today descend directly from these historic collections.
-There is a 37-mile-long avenue in Pizhou, Jiangsu, China that is estimated to have around one million Dawn Redwoods planted along it.

Red Maple 3

Acer rubrum

A versatile and widespread tree, known for its brilliant fall color and remarkable adaptability

Habitat
Red Maple is native to eastern and central North America and is now one of the most abundant and widespread tree species in the entire region. Its success is tied to its ability to grow in an extraordinary range of habitats, including swamps, bottomland forests, moist coves, streambanks, upland forests, and even dry ridges. Its tolerance of disturbance, compacted soils, and fluctuating moisture has also made it a popular urban and campus ornamental, especially valued for its vibrant red fall foliage.

Size & Form
A medium to large tree typically reaching 50–80 feet in height with a spread of 25–50 feet. It is fast-growing, often adding 12–24 inches per year. Red Maple usually lives 80–100 years, though some individuals persist longer in favorable sites.

Campus Note
Several Red Maples are found across the PennWest California campus, though students often walk past them without noticing. These trees tend to be smaller or closely pruned, often growing beneath larger canopy species, reflecting their role as an understory or mid-canopy tree. Red Maple is also frequently confused with Freeman's Maple, a widely planted hybrid with similar leaves and form, and common on campus. Distinguishing the two is a common exercise in dendrology, focusing on subtle differences in leaf shape, buds, branching, and seasonal color.

Description
Red Maple's leaves are typically three-lobed with shallow sinuses and turn vivid shades of red, orange, or yellow in autumn. Young bark is smooth and gray, becoming darker and more furrowed with age. Opposite branching, reddish buds, and early-season flowers provide distinctive identification features. In early spring, clusters of small red flowers bloom before leaf-out, followed by paired winged samaras ("helicopters").

Did You Know?
- Red Maple provides food for a wide range of wildlife, including rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, deer, moose, beavers, and many bird species.
- Because it thrives in both wet and dry habitats, tolerates disturbance, and regenerates readily, even in shade, Red Maple has become the most abundant and widespread tree in Pennsylvania's forests. Fire suppression and land-use changes have further encouraged its expansion.
- Pioneers extracted cinnamon-colored dyes from the bark.
- Native Americans used Red Maple wood to craft arrowheads, bowls, baskets, and tool handles, and prepared an eye rinse from the bark to help reduce inflammation.

Bur Oak 4

Quercus macrocarpa

A landmark of the frontier, guiding early settlers where prairie and forest met

Habitat
Bur oak is widespread across the eastern United States and the Great Plains. It grows best on dry uplands and slopes but also occurs in stream bottoms and other lowlands. The Bur oak is a defining tree of the oak savanna, the open, grassy transition between prairie and forest. Its deep root system and thick bark make it resilient in challenging environments, including areas shaped by periodic fire.

Size & Form
A large, broad-canopied tree reaching 50–120 feet tall and often spreading up to 100 feet wide. Bur oak develops thick, corky twigs and stout branches, giving it a bold, rugged profile. Its size and longevity make it one of the most impressive native oaks.

Campus Note
While several bur oaks grow on the PennWest California campus, the largest and most impressive stands behind Old Main, where the president's office is located. Reaching nearly 80 feet, this tall, straight tree drops its large, fringed acorns along the walkway each autumn, which students often stop to pick up and examine.
Its deep, powerful root system is well known to the campus grounds crew, as it extends close to the foundation of Old Main and requires ongoing attention. Despite this concern, the tree's age, stature, and beauty make it one of the campus's most cherished specimens, and every effort is made to protect it so it may continue to be enjoyed by all.

Description
The large, leathery leaves can be up to 12 inches in length. Bur oak is easily identified by its large, fringed acorns, the feature that gives the species its name. These acorns are ¾–2 inches long, with a deep, scaly cap covering half to three-quarters of the nut and ending in a distinctive fringe. The species is sometimes called "mossycup oak." Its thick, corky branches and deeply ridged bark further contribute to its unmistakable appearance.

Did You Know?
- Historically, bur oak wood was used for barrels, flooring, and furniture due to its strength and durability.
- The large acorns are an important food source for deer, squirrels, birds, bears, and many small mammals.
- Bur oak is long-lived, often surviving for centuries.
- The fire-resistant bark and deep roots allow it to persist in oak savannas and prairie edges where few other tree species can survive.
- For early settlers moving west, bur oaks served as natural landmarks on the prairie–forest border. Their tall, open-grown forms were visible from long distances and often marked early homestead sites and travel routes.


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River Birch 5

Betula nigra

A riverbank tree whose peeling salmon-colored bark stands out in every season

Habitat
Native primarily to the southeastern United States but also common in southern and central Pennsylvania, the river birch naturally grows along rivers, streams, floodplains, and other moist lowland areas. It is a pioneer species, often found at lower elevations where its tolerance for wet soils gives it a competitive advantage.

Size & Form
Typically a sub-canopy tree reaching 40–70 feet tall, with a trunk diameter of 15–30 inches. Its form is often multi-stemmed, giving it an elegant, spreading appearance.

Campus Note
River birch is found in the main Quad at PennWest California, where it grows alongside several other birch species. Together, these trees form one of the most distinctive groups on campus—their bark ranging in color from soft gray, creamy yellow, and bright white to the river birch's striking pink-salmon curls. This variety of textures and colors makes the birches stand out year-round and adds unique character to the Quad landscape.

Description
The river birch is easily recognized by its distinctive coppery, reddish–salmon, exfoliating bark, which peels in thin curls and sheets. Leaves are ovate and doubly serrated.
It is monoecious, bearing both male and female catkins on the same tree: long, pendulous male catkins at twig tips and shorter, upright female catkins near the leaves. Unlike other birches, the river birch does not produce seeds in autumn.

Did You Know?
- River birch wood has been used for inexpensive furniture, basket hoops, and turned wooden goods.
- Wildlife benefits from the tree as well: birds feed on its seeds, and deer browse its leaves.
- It is susceptible to anthracnose leaf blight (*Gloeosporium betularum*).
- In the South, mistletoe commonly colonizes river birch where moisture and low elevations favor its growth.
- Because of its rapid growth and tolerance for difficult conditions, river birch is often planted for erosion control and has been successful in reclaiming strip mines.
- River birch has become increasingly popular in urban landscapes as an ornamental tree. Its eye-catching bark, graceful form, and tolerance of compacted soils, heat, and periodic flooding make it a frequent choice for city parks, campuses, and residential areas.

Common Bald Cypress 6

Taxodium distichum

A southern wetland giant, thriving here far from the swamps where it evolved

Habitat
The Bald Cypress is native to the swamps, floodplains, and slow-moving rivers of the Midwest, Southeast, and Mid-Atlantic United States. While closely associated with standing water and saturated soils, it is surprisingly adaptable and can grow in well-drained upland soils if provided adequate sunlight and periodic moisture.

Size & Form
A large conifer that typically reaches 100–120 feet tall in its native range, with a straight, columnar trunk. In wetter habitats, mature trees often develop a broad, flared base ("buttressing") that enhances stability.

Campus Note
A large, mature Bald Cypress grows prominently in the main Quad at PennWest California, often surprising students and visitors who recognize it as a southern wetland tree and wonder how it can thrive so far from ponds or marshes. Its success here reflects two important ecological principles: a lack of competition, as in the open Quad, the Bald Cypress faces little competition for sunlight, allowing it to flourish even in well-drained soil. It is also well-cared for by the campus grounds crew.
The species is well known for its cypress knees, which aid in stabilization in swampy soils. On campus, if you look closely, you can see small cypress knees emerging just above the grass, subtle reminders of the tree's swamp-dwelling ancestry.

Description
Unlike most conifers, Bald Cypress is deciduous; its soft, feathery needles turn a warm rusty copper in autumn before dropping for winter, giving rise to the name "bald" cypress. Its distinctive, round, green cones break apart to release seeds eaten by wild turkeys, wood ducks, squirrels, evening grosbeaks, and other wildlife. Many of the seeds are dispersed by water in floodplain habitats.
A hallmark of the species is its pneumatophores, or "knees," vertical, woody structures that rise from the root system. In wetlands, these knees help stabilize the tree in soft, saturated soils and may aid in gas exchange. In the southern parts of its range, branches may sometimes be draped in Spanish moss.

Did You Know?
- Bald Cypress heartwood is extremely rot-resistant and has been historically valued for fence posts, boats, cabinets, flooring, caskets, and millwork.
- Ecologically, Bald Cypress stabilizes soils, reduces erosion, slows the flow of floodwaters, and traps pollutants, thereby improving water quality.
- Swamps dominated by Bald Cypress support diverse wildlife: frogs, toads, salamanders, wood ducks, catfish, wading birds, and raptors.
- In the southern swamps where Bald Cypress naturally grows, snakes are sometimes found resting on their low branches, an unexpected sight that has startled many visitors exploring these scenic backwater areas.

Northern Catalpa

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Catalpa speciosa

One of the first trees to announce spring, its showy white flowers are a welcome sign of the season's return

Habitat
Native to the central United States, the Northern Catalpa is highly adaptable and grows along streams, rivers, and lakes. It also thrives in open uplands and in urban landscapes, where it is often planted for shade and ornamental value.

Size & Form
Typically 40–60 feet tall with a broad, spreading crown. Its coarse branching pattern and large leaves give it a bold, almost tropical appearance.

Campus Note
The noticeably large white flowers of the Northern Catalpa burst into bloom before most other trees on campus have even leafed out. Throughout the summer and fall, its showy blossoms, oversized leaves, and long, slender seed pods make it an eye-catching presence. These dangling pods often hang low over the pathway, sometimes brushing or gently "scratching" the heads of students walking beneath, adding to the tree's memorable character on campus.

Description
Northern Catalpa is easily recognized by its large, heart-shaped leaves, among the biggest of any tree on campus. Leaves often occur in whorls of three, giving twigs a distinctive summer appearance.
In late spring, catalpa produces clusters of showy white, orchid-like flowers streaked with purple and yellow, often the first big, attention-grabbing blooms on campus, signaling that spring has truly arrived. By fall, the flowers mature into long, slender seed pods resembling thin green "cigars" that dry to dark brown and often persist on the tree into winter.

Did You Know
- Northern Catalpa was widely planted by early settlers and railroad companies because its lightweight yet durable wood made excellent fence posts and railroad ties.
- In some regions, catalpa trees are planted deliberately to attract the catalpa sphinx moth, whose large caterpillars, called "catalpa worms," are prized as fishing bait, especially for catfish.
- The Northern Catalpa appears frequently in folk medicine traditions.
- Today, Northern Catalpa is a popular shade and ornamental tree, valued for its dramatic flowering display, oversized leaves, and distinctive form through the seasons.

American Sycamore 8 

Platanus occidentalis

A giant of the bottomlands, long revered by Indigenous peoples and still one of the most massive trees in the East

Habitat
American Sycamore is native throughout the eastern and central United States and is especially common along rivers, streams, and floodplains, where its roots thrive in deep, moist soils. Its remarkable tolerance for flooding and urban stress has made it a familiar tree in both natural and city landscapes.

Size & Form
One of the largest deciduous trees in North America, sycamore can reach 100–150 feet tall with massive trunks often exceeding 10 feet in diameter. It is widely considered the largest tree by trunk volume in Pennsylvania. Large, spreading limbs form an open, irregular crown that dominates any landscape.

Campus Note
Several large American Sycamores grow on the PennWest California campus, along with the similar-looking London Plane Tree, a hybrid species often mistaken for the American Sycamore. Students in ecology and dendrology courses frequently learn how to tell these two apart by their bark patterns, leaves, and fruit clusters.
The largest and oldest sycamore on campus, believed to be more than 200 years old, stands beside Heron Hall, almost as if guarding its entrance. Its massive limbs and striking white bark make it one of the most impressive trees on campus. If you look closely, you can still see the remnants of a heavy chain stretching between two large branches, a long-ago, well-intentioned but misguided attempt to stabilize the tree. Despite this intervention, the sycamore has continued to thrive and remains a living connection to the earliest history of the campus.

Description
Sycamore leaves are broad, palmately lobed, and resemble oversized maple leaves.
Round, spiky seed balls hang from branches on long stalks, often persisting through winter before breaking apart and dispersing their fuzzy seeds. The tree's most recognizable feature is its patchwork bark, which flakes away to reveal smooth whites, greens, and grays, giving the trunk a mottled, camouflage-like appearance.

Did You Know?
- For many Indigenous cultures of the Midwest and East, the American Sycamore was an important cultural and symbolic tree. Its enormous size and hollow trunks provided gathering spaces, shelter, canoes, and food storage.
- It is said that some hollow sycamores were large enough for people or even horses to stand inside.
- Early European settlers were likewise impressed by its size and commonly used sycamore for butcher blocks, bowls, crates, and interior millwork, valuing its durability and resistance to splitting.
- Sycamores are long-lived, with many surviving well beyond two centuries.

Weeping Willow

Salix babylonica

A graceful tree inviting you into its hidden world

Habitat
Native to northern China, the weeping willow thrives in moist places, riverbanks, stream edges, and wetland margins. Its sweeping, cascading branches have made it one of the most widely planted ornamental trees in the world.

Size & Form
A fast-growing tree (often 3–8 feet per year), the weeping willow typically reaches 30–50 feet tall and develops a wide, gracefully spreading canopy. Its long, curtain-like branchlets sway with the slightest breeze, creating one of the most recognizable silhouettes of any tree.

Campus Note
PennWest California has a single mature weeping willow, a campus favorite. Its branches drape to the ground, forming a natural green alcove. Many students describe walking beneath it as stepping into another world. It almost seems to say: *"Come in—enter my shelter."*

Description
The weeping willow possesses very long, thin branchlets that distinctively droop down. The leaves are narrow, as they typically have a width of only 0.5 inches. These leaves have fine teeth around their margin. The top of the leaf is a light green and the underside of the leaf is more of a silver-green color. The bark is grayish-brown, corky, and it has deep fissures.

Did You Know?
- Willow bark contains salicin, a compound the body converts into salicylic acid—the basis for modern aspirin.
- Because their wood is soft and brittle, weeping willows often break during storms and typically live only 30–50 years.
- In Chinese culture, the weeping willow symbolizes friendship and parting. For centuries, willow branches were exchanged between friends as tokens of connection, the tree's name (*liǔ*) sounding similar to "stay."
- Weeping willows provide cover and nesting sites for a variety of birds and small mammals.
- Their early-season flowers offer nectar and pollen when few other blossoms are available, making them important for bees and other pollinators.

Tulip Tree 10

Liriodendron tulipifera

A towering hardwood whose leaves and flowers echo the shape of its name

Habitat
Native to the eastern United States, the tulip tree grows in rich, moist soils. In northern regions, it thrives in coves, along streams, and on moist slopes. Farther south, where temperatures rise, it is mainly restricted to deep, moist stream bottoms.

Size & Form
A tall, straight tree that can reach 120–160 feet in ideal conditions, making it one of the tallest hardwood species in North America. Mature trees develop a broad crown 30–50 feet wide. Its smooth trunk and strong vertical growth give it a striking, upright form.

Campus Note
A single tulip tree grows in the main campus Quad at PennWest California. Tall, straight, and rising well above all neighboring trees, it serves as a landmark visible from across the Quad and stands as one of the most impressive hardwood specimens on campus.

Description
The tulip tree is easily recognized by its tulip-shaped leaves, bright green with four distinct lobes, and by its orange-yellow, cup-like flowers that bloom in late spring. These flowers develop into upright, cone-shaped seed clusters that persist into winter. Its extensive root system helps stabilize streambanks and slopes, reducing erosion in its native habitats.

Did You Know?
- Although generally hardy, tulip trees may be affected by tulip tree scale, yellow-poplar weevils, Colombian timber beetles, and root-collar borers.
- Native Americans traditionally hollowed the straight trunks to make canoes, giving rise to the nickname “canoe tree.”
- The wood—light, durable, and resistant to splitting—was widely used for barns, homes, and furniture.
- In literature, the tulip tree often symbolizes strength, beauty, and upright character.

Pin Oak 11

Quercus palustris

One of the campus's most iconic canopy trees

Habitat
Pin oak is native to the eastern and central United States, where it thrives in wet bottomlands, stream margins, and periodically flooded soils. Its species name, *palustris*, means "of the marsh," a nod to its preferred habitat.

Size & Form
A medium-to-large oak reaching 50–80 feet tall, the pin oak grows faster than many other oaks—often 1–2 feet per year. Its distinctive branching pattern gives it a recognizable silhouette: upright branches high in the canopy, nearly horizontal branches in the mid-section, and a lower tier that angles downward.

Campus Note
The PennWest California campus is home to several magnificent mature pin oaks—likely 75+ years old—towering above nearby walkways and lawns. These trees are among the largest and grandest oaks on campus, offering cooling shade in summer and rich russet-brown leaves that cling into winter.

Description
Glossy, deeply lobed leaves turn a warm bronze in fall. The leaves have 5-7 lobes. The small acorns have a shallow cap that covers about one fourth of the nut. The light grayish-brown bark has shallow ridges.

Did You Know?
- Pin oak wood is often used for pulp and firewood, as it tends to warp during drying.
- Historically, Indigenous groups ground acorns into meal for soups or used the bark in traditional remedies.
- Young pin oaks often retain dead lower branches, "pins," which inspired the tree's common name.
- Pin oak supports a broad array of wildlife, from insects to mammals. Its acorns fuel autumn and winter diets, while its branching structure provides nesting spots for birds and perches for woodpeckers.

Maidenhair Tree 12  

Ginkgo Biloba

A living fossil that bridges the age of dinosaurs and today's campus paths

Habitat
Native to China, the Ginkgo has an ancient lineage and once grew widely across the world. Today, it is found along city streets, campuses, and parks because of its durability and graceful shape.

Size & Form
A medium to large tree, typically 50–100 feet tall with a spreading crown 30–60 feet wide. *G. biloba* grows slowly but can live an exceptionally long time, many over 1,000 years. One famous tree in Beijing is estimated to be more than 3,500 years old.

Campus Note
Two large female ginkgo trees grow prominently in the Quad at PennWest California. In autumn, they are among the most striking trees on campus, glowing brilliant gold and drawing constant attention. Visitors quickly learn these are female trees: their fallen seeds release a strong, distinctive odor. These seeds possess a fleshy outer layer that has a strong odor caused by butyric acid, the same compound responsible for the smell of rancid butter. This is why most ginkgo trees planted in public landscapes are male.

Description
Ginkgo leaves are smooth, fan-shaped, and often have two distinct lobes (the source of the name biloba). In autumn, they turn a brilliant golden-yellow. The leaves often drop all at once after a hard frost, forming a bright yellow carpet beneath the tree. Although they resemble small fruits, ginkgoes do not produce true fruits; the fleshy layer is part of the seed coat. The bark is gray-brown and furrowed.

Did You Know?
- *Ginkgo biloba* is the only surviving species in its plant family (Ginkgoaceae), and fossils show that its ancestors grew over 200 million years ago, dating back to the age of dinosaurs. Despite its ancient origins, it is remarkably resilient, thriving in modern cities and showing strong resistance to pollution, disease, and pests.
- Ginkgo leaves have long been used in traditional medicine. Modern extracts are studied for potential effects on memory, circulation, anxiety, and inflammation, though results are mixed.
- Cooked seeds are used in some Asian cuisines, especially soups and desserts, but raw seeds can be toxic and should never be eaten uncooked.
- The wood is lightweight and traditionally used for small carved items, cutting boards, and chess boards.

Pawpaw 13

Asimina triloba

The campus's tropical-tasting native tree

Habitat
Pawpaw is native to the eastern United States and southern Ontario, where it grows in moist, shaded places, stream banks, low woods, ditches, and floodplain edges. Though often overlooked in the wild, it is one of our region's most unique native trees.

Size & Form
A small understory tree, pawpaw typically reaches 15–25 feet tall. It forms colonies through root suckers and has large, drooping, tropical-looking leaves, making it easy to recognize.

Campus Note
Our campus arboretum includes a single young pawpaw, recently planted but already producing fruit. Each year, the fruit ripens… and then vanishes almost immediately, presumably enjoyed by hungry students before wildlife ever gets a chance.

Description
The long, oval leaves release a strong, peppery scent when crushed—often compared to green bell peppers. The bark is smooth overall, and Buds are fuzzy in texture and deep brown. The gray bark is relatively smooth. Pawpaw bears the largest edible fruit native to the United States. Soft, custard-like, and aromatic, the fruit tastes like a blend of banana, mango, and vanilla.

Did You Know?
- The fruit is rich in potassium and vitamins A and C, and is used in ice cream, breads, cookies, smoothies, and even home-made custards.
- Pawpaw fruit is eaten by raccoons, foxes, deer, turkeys, and black bears.
- Its leaves are the exclusive host plant for the Zebra Swallowtail butterfly, whose caterpillars feed only on members of the pawpaw family.
- Pawpaw leaves and bark contain natural compounds called acetogenins, which deter insects from feeding. Historically, crushed leaves were even rubbed on skin as a temporary insect repellent.

Special Thanks and Resources

Photography Credits

Many of the photographs in this booklet were taken by students Olivia Golias and Shyann Kerelitch as part of the *Campus Arboretum Project*. Their work helped document and highlight the tree diversity of the PennWest California campus.

Additional images were provided by Dr. Robert Whyte and PennWest University – California.

Suggested Further Readings and Resources

Books:

- Petrides, G. A., and J. Wehr. *Peterson Field Guide to Eastern Trees.*
- Farrar, J. L. *Trees of the Northern United States and Canada.*

Web Resources:

- *Common Trees of Pennsylvania* — Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)
- *USDA PLANTS Database* — plants.usda.gov

Places:

- PennWest University – California Arboretum
- John Franklin Lewis Herbarium

Special Thanks

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This booklet was created to support the PennWest California Campus Arboretum and to encourage exploration of the trees that shape our campus landscape.

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"The wonder is that we can see these trees and not wonder more"

-Ralph Waldo Emerson