

Daily Courier

HOME & GARDEN

MARCH 13, 2022

LOOKING UP

Tree enthusiasts
invited to learn
from an expert

INSIDE

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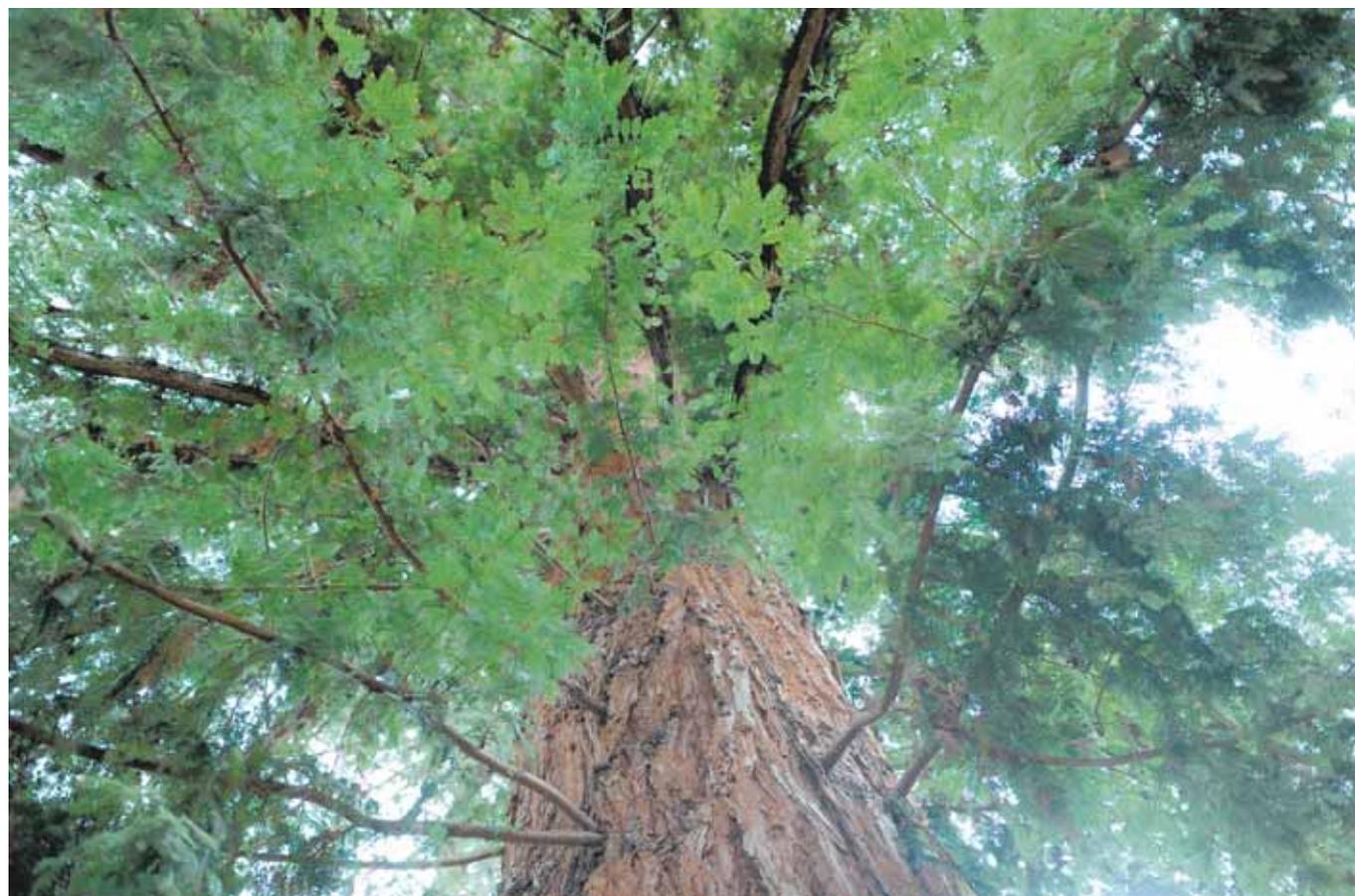




ABOVE: Local horticulturist and retired nursery owner Rachel Winters holds a Douglas fir cone as she talks about trees at Riverside Park in Grants Pass.

RIGHT: One can't help but look up to a sequoia at Riverside Park, which offers a living classroom of trees for an upcoming workshop.

Photos by BEA AHBECK / Daily Courier





ABOVE: Blue spruce needles are spread evenly around the stem — a tell-tale identification.

LEFT: Rachel Winters talks about Oregon native Port Orford cedars and their modified leaves.

Photos by BEA AHBECK / Daily Courier

MEET THE TREES

Horticulturist explains the unique characteristics of our local native species

By Kathleen Alaks
of the Daily Courier

Years ago, when I donated money to the Arbor Day Foundation, I received a pamphlet titled “What Tree Is That?”

This handy, illustrated pocket guide was a step-by-step key for identifying trees by their bark, leaves — shape, texture and arrangement on twigs — cones, seed pods, nuts and some other distinguishing characteristics.

That version of the guide was specific to the central United States, where I lived at the time. But, when I moved west from Illinois, first to eastern Washington and then to Southern Oregon, I faced a whole new cast of arboreal characters to learn about.

Being educated about the trees around you is not only practical — like when you need just the right tree for that certain spot in your yard or when you need to know if that nut or fruit is edible — but it’s also a way of being more connected to the natural world around you, to not be a stranger in your own backyard.

Horticulturist Rachel Winters knows trees.

A former nursery owner, professional landscape designer and one-time Daily Courier gardening columnist, Winters has taught a ton of horticulture classes, mostly through Rogue Community College, the Siskiyou Field Institute and local garden clubs.

Her wealth of botanical knowledge extends to field botany, plant identification, plant propagation, landscaping with native plants, ornamental pruning, bonsai and using lichens to make dye.

On April 10, Winters is leading a tree identification

Are you tree blind?

WHAT: Meet the Trees, a field identification class focusing on identifying Oregon native trees by bark, leaves, flowers and seeds, plus stories about their history and uses, for ages 12 and older, sponsored through the Siskiyou Field Institute

WHO: Instructor Rachel Winters

WHEN: 12:30-3:30 p.m. April 10

WHERE: Riverside Park, Grants Pass

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: Easy-going walking of less than 1 mile with frequent stops

COST: \$31.50 for SFI members, \$35 for nonmembers

CONTACT: 541-597-8530, siskiyoufieldinstitute.org and click on Field Courses

MORE: If the spring class fills up, another class likely will be scheduled in summer or fall.

class in Riverside Park.

So just how do you tell a fir from a pine from a cedar? A beech from an oak from a maple? It’s all about observation and paying attention.

“Sometimes you can just stand back and recognize [a tree] by its form,” Winters said. “Sometimes you have to get up for a closer look.”

On a recent afternoon in Riverside Park, Winters gave a crash course on some of our area’s native trees.

Let’s start with the conifers, which are trees that produce seeds in cones.

DOUGLAS FIR. Oregon’s state tree, the Douglas fir is not actually a fir at all, Winters said. “It’s its own category.”

On a Douglas fir, the cones hang down off the branch; on a true fir, the cones sit upright on branches.

“And with the Douglas fir you’ll almost always find cones. With true firs, when their cones hit the ground, they disintegrate,” Winters said.

Douglas fir bark is also distinctive: rough looking and deeply furrowed.

“Without even looking at the leaves or cones, you can tell it’s a Douglas fir,” she said.

PORT ORFORD CEDAR. This conifer, native to Oregon and northwestern California, ranges from Coos Bay south to Arcata, California, and about 100 miles inland.

It is not a true cedar, Winters said. True cedars grow only in the Himalayas and the Mediterranean and are members of the pine family.

The “cedars” of North America belong to the cypress family.

“But their wood is fragrant. That’s why they’re called cedars, but none are actual cedars,” Winters said.

The Port Orford cedar is most easily identified by its small rosebud-shaped cones, by the white X pattern on the undersides of its small, flat scaly leaves and by its lavender pollen cones.

INCENSE CEDAR. Also not a true cedar, this Oregon conifer has distinctive, ropey bark and branches that hang down and “swoop,” Winters says.

It also has small, scale-like leaves that overlap, so that

Spring into Savings

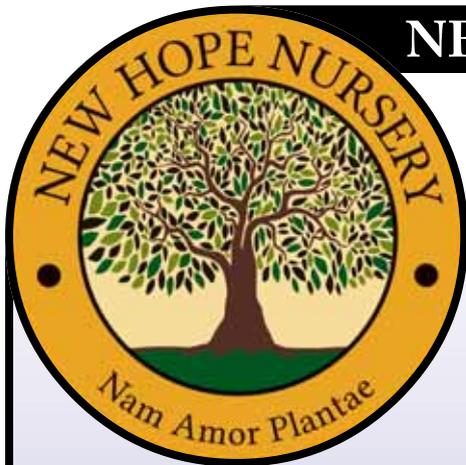
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The tiny cone of the sequoia is designed to be dispersed by wind.

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“when you touch it and run your fingers backwards, it’s not soft, it’s prickly,” Winters said.

PINES. Pine trees have needles that are gathered in bundles. The number of needles in a bundle can tell you which type of pine you have, Winters said.

The ponderosa pine, one of the more common in our area, has three needles in each bundle.

“It also has jigsaw puzzle bark” Winters said. “And the cones are prickly, with a sharp point on each scale.”

Like the ponderosa, the Jeffrey pine has three needles in each bundle. But it grows primarily in serpentine soils and has softer cones: “Prickly ponderosa, gentle Jeffrey.”

BLUE SPRUCE. The best way to identify a spruce is by its short, stiff needles and the way they are positioned completely around a branch.

A blue spruce, whose coloring may be subtle, can best be identified by its cigar-shaped cones.

REDWOODS. There are three different types of redwoods in Riverside Park: the coast redwood, the giant sequoia and the dawn redwood also called metasequoia.

They all have spongy bark that is

“designed to hold water like a sponge,” Winters said. “And the trunks flare up at the bottom, like a skirt.”

Surprisingly, redwoods have very small cones.

“This big giant tree has these teeny tiny cones,” she said. “They’re designed to be wind pollinated, to be carried on the wind and blow somewhere else.”

The foliage of the coast redwood is soft to the touch, whereas on the sequoia the foliage is more rough and the leaves somewhat shorter. The dawn redwood is deciduous, meaning it sheds its leaves in the winter.

“It does really well as a garden tree,” Winters said of the dawn redwood. “It’s easy to propagate.”

Next, let’s look at some native non-cone bearing trees, more commonly called deciduous, meaning that they lose their leaves in the winter.

OAKS. “Our area has two important deciduous oaks: the white oak and the black oak,” Winters said.

The white oak ranges from British Columbia south to Southern California, while the black oak ranges from around Canyonville, Oregon, to Baja, California.

“Their ranges overlap, so we have both here,” she said.

The common names are derived from

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the color of the wood inside rather than from any outward characteristic.

The best way to tell the difference: black oak leaves have pointed tips; the white oak leaf lobes are rounded.

EUROPEAN BEECH. Native to northern Europe, the European beech can grow to be quite ancient and gnarly.

It can be identified by its distinct sharp-pointed buds. And though it is deciduous, it hangs onto its old leaves until spring.

SYCAMORE. Also called a plane tree, the sycamore has distinctive, mottled, peeling bark that gives the tree a scabby look.

“Some trees frankly are more spectacular when they don’t have leaves,” Winters said. “And this is one of them.”

So it can add interest to a winter landscape.

MAPLES. Maple trees are most easily recognized by their distinct leaf shape, with pointed lobes and deep indentations.

Maples also have unique seed pods, which are paired together like wings.

“They’re like a helicopter, perfectly designed to twirl around in the air and get themselves planted,” Winters said.

The two most common maples in local landscapes are the vine maple, which is native, and the small Japanese maple or large big-leaf maple.



BEA AHBECK / Daily Courier

The gnarly bark of a black oak, one of two local species of oak — the other being the white oak — fascinates tree specialist Rachel Winters, who’ll be teaching tree identification basics in her upcoming workshop.

Reach reporter Kathleen Alaks at 541-474-3815 or kalaks@thedailycourier.com.

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