Introduction

This dichotomous seed guide to the trees of Overton Park is part of a research collaboration between Rhodes College and the Overton Park Conservancy aimed at understanding forest health and dynamics. While not comprehensive, it includes all the species found in seed traps distributed throughout the park.

To use this key, simply answer the questions describing how a seed looks, then look at the images taken of seeds from the park.
Is the seed... winged or having a papery layer around seed or Not winged

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Go to page 4
Is the seed...

Large (larger than 1 cm in diameter) with a hard, protective layer

or

Smaller than 1 cm in diameter

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Go to page 16
Does the seed...

- have a scaly cap
- or
- not have a scaly cap

Go to page 6

Go to page 13
Is the seed...

More round than elliptical  

or  

More elliptical than round

Go to page 7  

Go to page 8
Quercus alba

white oak
Does the seed look like...

Go to page 9

Go to page 10

Go to page 11

Go to page 12
Quercus falcata
southern red oak
Quercus velutina

eastern black oak
Quercus pagoda
cherrybark oak
Quercus muehlenbergii
Chinkapin Oak
Does the seed...

Have ridges separating shell into four segments

or

Not have ridges separating shell

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Go to page 15
Carya cordiformis
bitternut hickory
Carya tomentosa
mockernut hickory
Is the seed...

- Very small, elongated and fringed with hairs
- or
- not fringed with hairs

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Go to page 18
Platanus occidentalis
American sycamore
Is the seed... Uniform in coloration or patterned

Go to page 19  Go to page 32
Is the seed...

Round or not round

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Go to page 29
Is the seed... 
wrinkled or not wrinkled

Go to page 26

Go to page 21
Does the seed...

Come to a tapered point at one end

or

Come to a tapered point at both ends

Go to page 22

Go to page 25
Is the seed...

striated or not striated

Go to page 23

Go to page 24
Cornus drummondii

Roughleaf dogwood
Prunus serotina
black cherry
Sassafras albidum

sassafras
Is the seed...

Striated with grooves or not striated

Go to page 28  Go to page 27
Celtis laevigata
sugarberry or southern hackberry
Cornus alternifolia

pagoda or alternateleaf dogwood
Does the seed...

Have a red aril and is less than 2 cm

or

not have a red aril and is greater than 2 cm

Go to page 30

Go to page 31
Magnolia grandiflora

Southern magnolia
Asimina triloba

Pawpaw
Is the seed...

Elongated and striated or round with a mottled coat

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Go to page 34
Nyssa sylvatica
black tupelo
Lindera benzoin
spicebush
Is the seed...

Enclosed by the wing or on one end of the wing

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Go to page 45
Loosely enclosed within the wing or tightly enclosed within the wing is the seed...
Ostrya virginiana
American hophornbeam
Is the seed... 

Single, large (greater than .5 cm) or in a capsule, with many tiny seeds (1-3 mm in diameter)

Go to page 40

Go to page 39
Paulownia tomentosa
empress tree
Is the seed...

Fringed with short hairs or not fringed by short hairs

Go to page 42   Go to page 41
Ulmus rubra

slippery elm
Is the seed...

More rounded and large (seed is greater than 1 cm) or More elongated and small (seed is less than 1 cm)

Go to page 43    Go to page 44
Ulmus americana

American elm
Ulmus alata
winged elm or wahoo
Is the wing...

woody and brittle or Thin and papery

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Go to page 51
Is the wing...

More planar and two dimensional or

Hooked on one end, commonly in a cone

Go to page 47    Go to page 50
Does the seed...

come almost to a point at one end 
or

stay more rounded at both ends

Go to page 48

Go to page 49
Fraxinus pennsylvanica

green ash
Fraxinus americana

white ash
Liriodendron tulipifera
tulip poplar
Is the seed and wing...

Less than 1 cm long
Commonly found in a spiky ball

or

greater than 1 cm long and a "helicopter"

Go to page 52

Go to page 53
Liquidambar styraciflua
sweet gum
Does the wing... 

Follow the length of the seed or end at the seed

Go to page 54  Go to page 57
Is the wing...

Red, fades with age  or  Green, fades with age

Go to page 55  Go to page 56
Acer rubrum

Red maple

Left mature seeds;
Right fresh seeds
Acer saccharinum
silver maple
Is the seed...

Round or long and narrow, looks wasp-like.

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Go to page 59
Acer saccharum
sugar maple
Acer negundo

boxelder maple