

# Tree identification key

**Identification keys are used to identify specimens.  
This key is made up of a master key and 7 other keys.**

## How to use this key

- start at step 1 in the master key
- compare your specimens to the statements at each step
- keep following the instructions until you reach the name of a tree

## Contents of this key

This identification key is made up of the following sections:

Master key:	Types of tree found in gardens and urban areas	pages 2–3
Key 1:	Trees with leaves that are needle-like or scale-like	pages 3–7
Key 2:	Trees with broad leaves, arranged opposite each other in pairs	pages 7–9
Key 3:	Trees with leaves arranged alternately, divided into separate leaflets	pages 10–12
Key 4:	Evergreen trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets	pages 12–14
Key 5:	Deciduous trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets; fruits fleshy or juicy	pages 15–19
Key 6:	Deciduous trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets; fruits dry	pages 20–24
Key 7:	Cherry trees	pages 25–26

## Master key: types of tree found in gardens and urban areas

### Master key – step 1



Leaves needle-like or scale-like and often overlapping



**go to key 1**  
(page 3)



Leaves not needle-like, scale-like or overlapping



**go to step 2**

### Master key – step 2



Leaves in pairs, opposite each other on shoots



**go to key 2**  
(page 7)



Leaves alternate on shoots



**go to step 3**

### Master key – step 3



Leaves divided into separate leaflets



**go to key 3**  
(page 10)



Leaves with one blade, possibly indented into lobes, but not divided into leaflets



**go to step 4**

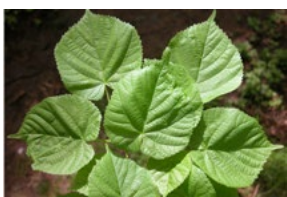
### Master key – step 4



Leaves evergreen



**go to key 4**  
(page 12)



Leaves deciduous



**go to step 5**

## Master key – step 5



Fruits fleshy or juicy



**go to key 5**  
(page 15)



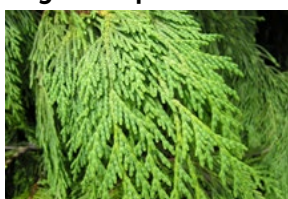
Fruits dry



**go to key 6**  
(page 20)

## Key 1: trees with leaves that are needle-like or scale-like

### Key 1 – step 1



All leaves scale-like, usually pressed against the twig



**go to step 2**



All leaves needle-like, usually spread widely apart



**go to step 6**



Some leaves scale-like, others needle-like



**go to step 14**

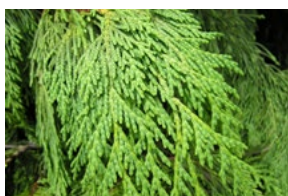
### Key 1 – step 2



Scale-leaves at least 30mm long, rigid and sharp-edged



**Monkey puzzle**

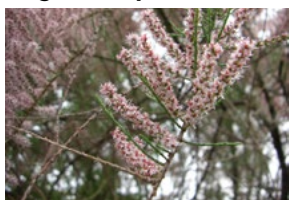


Scale-leaves less than 30mm long, not rigid or sharp



**go to step 3**

### Key 1 – step 3



Deciduous tree; foliage is wispy;  
pink or white flowers



**Tamarisks**



Evergreen tree with cones; foliage is  
dense



**go to step 4**

### Key 1 – step 4



Cone is egg-shaped with  
overlapping scales, eventually wide-  
spreading like petals of a flower;  
crushed foliage smells of pineapple



**Western red cedar**



Cone is egg- or ball-shaped,  
scales meet at edges and don't  
overlap, scales don't become wide-  
spreading; crushed foliage doesn't  
smell of pineapple



**go to step 5**

### Key 1 – step 5



Cone is egg-shaped with more than  
15 scales; bark is very thick, with  
visible fibres, and is rather soft or  
spongy



**Wellingtonia**



Cone is ball-shaped, with fewer than  
10 scales; bark is hard



**Cypresses**

### Key 1 – step 6



Needles are in two flat, parallel  
rows, at least on the short shoots  
growing off longer ones; fruit is  
scarlet and berry-like



**Yew**



All the needles are in clusters or are  
parted on either side of shoot, but  
not in flat rows; fruit is a woody cone



**go to step 7**



### Key 1 – step 7



Needles are all on their own at their position on the shoot



**go to step 8**



Most needles grouped around the shoot, in pairs or bundles of 2 or more



**go to step 10**

### Key 1 – step 8



Cones stand upright on branches; needles are attached by a sucker-like base



**Firs**



Cones hang downwards from branches; the base of the needles are not sucker-like



**go to step 9**

### Key 1 – step 9



Needles leave behind their peg-like bases after falling



**Spruces**



Needles leave behind their cushion-like bases after falling



**Hemlock spruces**

### Key 1 – step 10



Most needles are in bundles of 2-5



**go to step 11**



Most needles are arranged around the shoot in clusters of 3, 10 or more, rarely in pairs



**go to step 12**

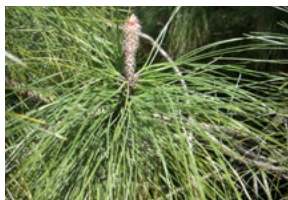
### Key 1 – step 11



Needles in bundles of 2



**Pines, 2-neededled**



Needles in bundles of 3



**Pines, 3-neededled**



Needles in bundles of 5



**Pines, 5-neededled**

### Key 1 – step 12



Needles on all shoots are arranged in rings of 3 going around the shoot, or occasionally in pairs



**Junipers**



Needles on short shoots, in clusters of 10 or more



**go to step 13**

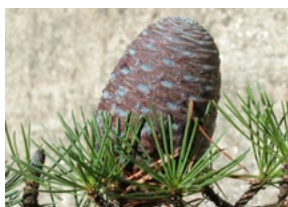
### Key 1 – step 13



A deciduous tree; the cones are egg-shaped



**Larches**



An evergreen tree; the cones are barrel-shaped



**Cedars**

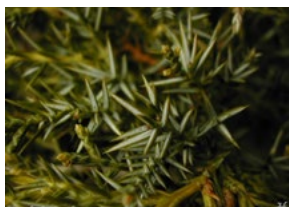
## Key 1 – step 14



Leaves of main shoots are scale-like, leaves of short shoots are needle-like, up to 20mm long, arranged in 2 rows; foliage doesn't smell unpleasant



**Coast redwood**



Leaves mostly scale-like; those towards the tips of shoots are needle-like, in opposite pairs, 5–6mm long; crushed foliage smells unpleasant



**Junipers**

## Key 2: trees with broad leaves, arranged opposite each other in pairs

### Key 2 – step 1



Leaves palmately divided into separate leaflets, the leaflets extending from the leaf stalk



**Horse chestnuts**



Leaves pinnately divided into separate leaflets, the leaflets in two rows on the stalk



**go to step 2**



Leaves are sometimes lobed, but are not divided into leaflets



**go to step 5**

### Key 2 – step 2



Small trees with ridged, corky bark; the fruit is a berry



**Elder**

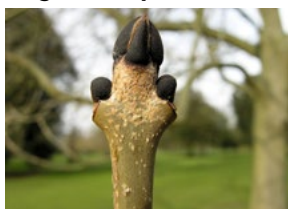


Tall trees with smooth or slightly wrinkled bark; fruits are dry and wing-shaped



**go to step 3**

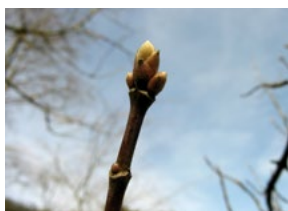
### Key 2 – step 3



Twigs are clearly flattened where the buds or leaves are attached; leaves are hairy on the underside; 1 fruit per stalk



**go to step 4**



Twigs are not flattened where the buds or leaves are attached; leaves are hairless on the underside; fruits in pairs on the stalks



**Ashleaf maple**

### Key 2 – step 4



Flowers have no petals; winter buds are black



**Ash**



Flowers have narrow white petals; winter buds are grey or brown



**Manna ash**

### Key 2 – step 5



Leaves are deeply palmately lobed; fruits are wing-shaped and in pairs



**go to step 9**



Leaves are not lobed or are only very shallowly lobed; fruit is either a woody capsule, a berry or a long, narrow pod



**go to step 6**

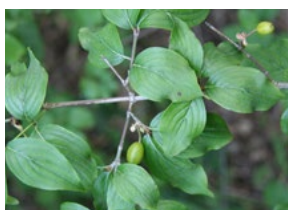
### Key 2 – step 6



Leaf edges are toothed



**Spindles**



Leaf edges are not toothed



**go to step 7**



## Key 2 – step 7



An evergreen tree, leaves are usually bluish-green and smell of eucalyptus when crushed; bark is usually shredding or flaking



**Eucalyptus**

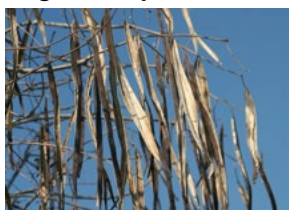


A deciduous tree, leaves are pale or bright green and don't smell when crushed; bark is not shredding



**go to step 8**

## Key 2 – step 8



A tall tree up to 20m; leaves are 10–25cm long; flowers are 5cm or more across; fruit is a long, narrow pod that remains after the leaves fall



**Indian bean tree**



A small tree to 8m; leaves are 4–10cm long; flowers are 4mm across; fruit is a red berry



**Cornelian cherry**

## key 2 – step 9



Leaves with 3-13 lobes. If 5-lobed, then any teeth present aren't small, coarse, round-tipped and numerous, or flowers/fruits don't hang in tails



**Maples  
(other than sycamore)**



Leaves 5-lobed with many small, coarse, round-tipped teeth; flowers/fruits in hanging tails



**Sycamore**

## Key 3: trees with leaves arranged alternately, divided into separate leaflets

### Key 3 – step 1



Leaves divided into 3 leaflets



**Laburnums**

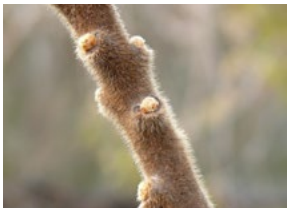


Leaves divided into more than 3 leaflets



**go to step 2**

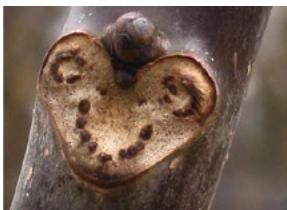
### Key 3 – step 2



Twigs are thick and densely covered with velvety hairs; flower heads (and later the seed heads) are dense, cone-shaped and hairy



**Stag's horn sumach**



Twigs not velvety; flowers and fruits are not in hairy, cone-shaped heads



**go to step 3**

### Key 3 – step 3



Twigs have a pair of thorns at the base of each leaf



**False acacia**



Twigs have no spines or thorns



**go to step 4**

### Key 3 – step 4



Twigs have distinctive Y-shaped scars where leaves have fallen; cut twigs leak latex; flowers are in catkins or clusters of 1–5



**Walnuts**



Leaf scars are not Y-shaped; cut twigs don't leak latex; flowers are numerous and in clusters.



**go to step 5**

### Key 3 – step 5



Leaflets are not lobed, they are not foul-smelling; the fruit is a pod



**Pagoda tree**



Leaflets have a few teeth or lobes in the lower half only and they are foul-smelling when crushed; the fruit is a papery, winged seed



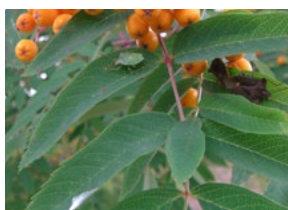
**Tree-of-heaven**



Leaflets are toothed or lobed, not foul-smelling; the fruit is a papery capsule



**Pride-of-India**



Leaflets are toothed at least in the upper half and are not foul-smelling; fruit is juicy and berry-like



**go to step 6**

### Key 3 – step 6



Lower part of the leaf is divided into 1–4 pairs of leaflets, the upper part is lobed in places but not completely divided



**Service trees**



Leaves are completely divided into 6 or more pairs of leaflets



**go to step 7**

### Key 3 – step 7



Ripe fruits are orange-red to vermillion-red or occasionally yellow, with yellow pulp



**Rowans with orange or vermillion fruit**



Ripe fruits are white to pink or crimson, with white pulp



**Rowan with white, pink or crimson fruit**

## Key 4: evergreen trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets

### Key 4 – step 1



Leaves have spiny edges



**go to step 2**



Leaves sometimes have toothed edges but are not spiny



**go to step 3**

### Key 4 – step 2



Leaves are white- or green-felted on the underside; fruit is an acorn; flowers are green, the male flowers are in slender catkins



**Evergreen oak**



Leaves are paler but hairless on the underside; fruit is a berry; flowers are white and in small clusters



**Hollies**



#### Key 4 – step 3



Leaves are aromatic when crushed



**go to step 4**



Leaves are not aromatic when crushed



**go to step 5**

#### Key 4 – step 4



Leaves smell of eucalyptus when crushed, or rarely of lemon, the edges are flat



**Eucalyptus**



Leaves smell of almonds when crushed; the edges are rolled under



**Cherry laurel**



Leaves smell of bay when crushed, the edges are wavy



**Bay**

#### Key 4 – step 5



Leaves are densely covered with rusty brown or grey hairs on the underside



**go to step 6**



Leaves are hairless or have white hairs on the underside



**go to step 7**

#### Key 4 – step 6



Flowers are on their own



**Evergreen magnolias**



Flowers are in clusters



**Rhododendrons**

#### Key 4 – step 7



Flowers are roughly 1cm long, urn-shaped and in small drooping clusters; the fruit is a warty, matt-red berry



**Strawberry tree**



Flowers are 3–5.5cm long, bell-shaped and in large rounded clusters; the fruit is a capsule



**Rhododendrons**



Flowers are 1–1.5cm across and flat, with up to 100 in erect spikes; the fruit is a smooth, shiny black berry



**Portugal laurel**



Flowers are less than 1cm across, flat and in clusters; the fruit is a red, orange or blue-black berry



**Cotoneasters**

## Key 5: deciduous trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets; fruits fleshy or juicy

### Key 5 – step 1



Leaves are fan-shaped with a central notch



**Maidenhair tree**



Leaves are not fan-shaped



**go to step 2**

### Key 5 – step 2



At least some leaves are lobed



**go to step 3**



Leaves are undivided, the edges may be toothed but not lobed



**go to step 6**

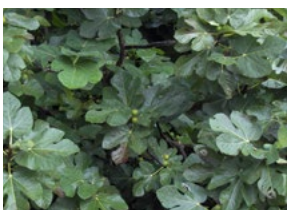
### Key 5 – step 3



Leaves are palmately lobed, distinctly bristly to the touch on the upper side



**go to step 4**



Leaves are pinnately lobed, smooth or softly hairy on the upper side



**go to step 5**

#### Key 5 – step 4



Some leaves are lobed and all are toothed; the fruit resembles a raspberry, red or purple when ripe



**Mulberry**



All leaves are lobed; the fruit is pear-shaped and brownish purple when ripe



**Fig**

#### Key 5 – step 5



Twigs are thorny



**Hawthorns**



Twigs are not thorny



**Whitebeams**

#### Key 5 – step 6



Leaves are not toothed



**Cotoneasters**



Leaves are toothed



**go to step 7**

#### Key 5 – step 7



Flowers and fruits are in cylinder- or cone-shaped spikes



**go to step 8**



Flowers and fruits are on their own, in pairs or in clusters



**go to step 9**



### Key 5 – step 8



Flowers are less than 10mm in diameter, the petals are broadly oval; the fruit is smooth at the apex



**Bird cherries**



Flowers are more than 10mm in diameter, the petals are narrow and strap-shaped; the fruit is crowned with the withered sepals



**Amelanchier**

### Key 5 – step 9



Flowers have 1 style; sepals are absent on the ripe fruit; 1 seed



**go to step 10**

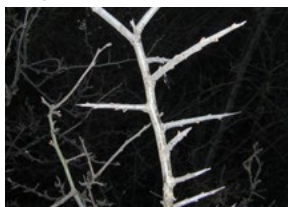


Flowers have 2 or more styles; sepals are usually present on the ripe fruit; 2 or more seeds



**go to step 14**

### Key 5 – step 10



Twigs are very thorny



**Blackthorn**

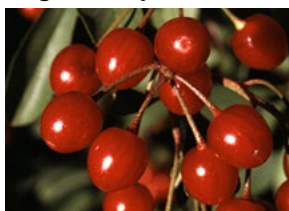


Twigs are not thorny or have only occasional thorns



**go to step 11**

### Key 5 – step 11



Fruit is less than 2cm long; the bark often has distinctive horizontal bands of pores



**go to key 7**  
(page 25)

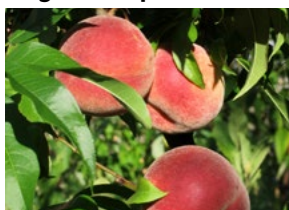


Fruit is more than 2cm long; the bark doesn't have horizontal bands of pores



**go to step 12**

### Key 5 – step 12



Fruit has a velvety skin, even when fully ripe



**Peach and almond**



Fruit has a smooth skin, often with a greyish waxy bloom on the skin



**go to step 13**

### Key 5 – step 13



Young twigs are green, smooth and glossy



**Cherry plum**



Young twigs are brown or grey, dull and often hairy



**Plum**

### Key 5 – step 14



Flowers and fruits in clusters of 11 or more, with their stalks not arising from a central point



**go to step 15**

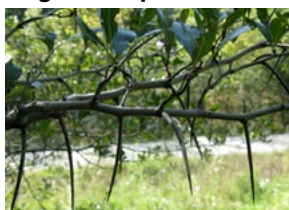


Flowers and fruits in clusters of 10 or fewer, with their stalks all arising from a central point



**go to step 16**

### Key 5 – step 15



Twigs are thorny or spiny, sometimes with very few spines



**Cockspur-thorns**



Twigs are not thorny



**Whitebeams**

### Key 5 – step 16



Fruit is usually pear-shaped, with gritty flesh; styles are not joined together at the base



**Pears**



Fruit is usually apple-shaped, the flesh is not gritty; styles are joined together at the base



**go to step 17**

### Key 5 – step 17



Fruits less than 4cm long



**Crab apple**



Fruits more than 4cm long



**Apples**

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## Key 6: deciduous trees with leaves arranged alternately, not divided into leaflets; fruits dry

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### Key 6 – step 1



Leaves are lobed



**go to step 2**



Leaves are not lobed



**go to step 6**

### Key 6 – step 2



Leaves are square or notched at the tip; the flowers are up to 5cm long and are on their own



**Tulip tree**



Leaves are rounded or pointed at the tip; the flowers are much smaller, in clusters or catkins



**go to step 3**

### Key 6 – step 3



Leaves are pinnately lobed; the fruit is an acorn



**Oaks**



Leaves are palmately or irregularly lobed; the fruits form a catkin or globe-shaped head

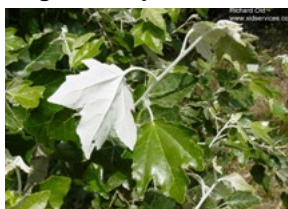


**go to step 4**

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#### Key 6 – step 4



Leaves are felted with white or grey hairs on the underside



**White poplar**

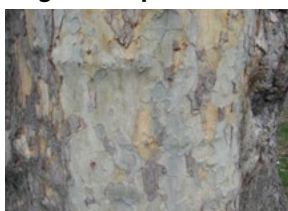


Leaves are smooth or sparsely hairy on the underside



**go to step 5**

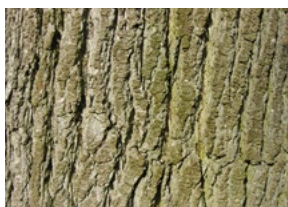
#### Key 6 – step 5



Bark is flaking in large patches; the fruits form a soft, hairy ball like a pom-pom



**Plane**

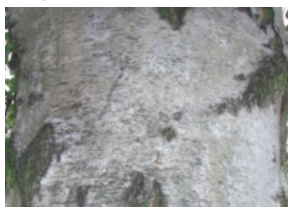


Bark is fissured, not flaking; the fruits form a stiff, spiky ball like the head of a mace



**Sweet-gum**

#### Key 6 – step 6



Bark is silver or white



**go to step 7**

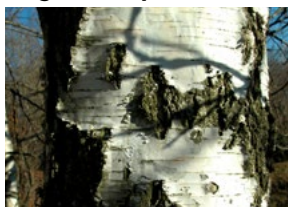


Bark is greyish or brown



**go to step 8**

#### Key 6 – step 7



Tree is weeping, the twigs and smaller branches hang loosely; the bark has black, diamond-shaped splits



**Silver birch**



Tree is not weeping; the bark is often peeling but doesn't have black diamond-shaped splits



**White or Himalayan birch**

### Key 6 – step 8



Leaves are more than 3 times as long as they are wide



**go to step 9**



Leaves are less than 3 times as long as they are wide



**go to step 11**

### Key 6 – step 9



Leaf edges are coarsely toothed, the teeth end in a softly spiny tip; the seeds are enclosed in a softly spiny husk



**Sweet chestnut**



Leaf edges are not indented but may have small, fine teeth; the seeds have a plume of silky hairs at one end



**go to step 10**

### Key 6 – step 10



Tree is weeping, the smaller branches hang downwards, often almost to the ground



**Weeping willow**



Tree is not weeping



**Willows**

### Key 6 – step 11



Fruit is a small, woody cone, they are numerous and stay on the tree until spring



**Alders**

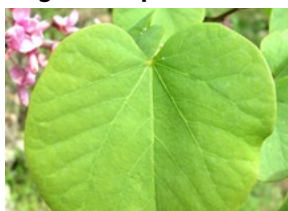


Fruit is not a woody cone



**go to step 12**

### Key 6 – step 12



Leaf edges aren't indented



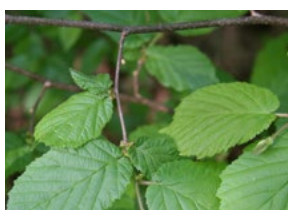
**go to step 13**



Leaf edges are toothed, the teeth may be very small



**go to step 15**

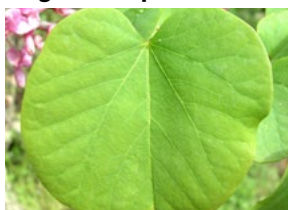


Leaves are double-toothed



**go to step 16**

### Key 6 – step 13



Leaves are almost circular; flowers are pea-like and found on the trunk and main branches as well as the twigs



**Judas tree**



Leaves are oval or egg-shaped; flowers aren't pea-like



**go to step 14**

### Key 6 – step 14



Leaves are flat and 15cm or more in length; the flowers have 5 or more large petals that are white or pink; the fruit is cone-like but not woody



**Magnolias**



Leaves are up to 9cm long with wavy edges; the flowers are greenish and don't have petals; the fruit has a spiny husk



**Beech**

### Key 6 – step 15



Flowers and fruits are in clusters suspended beneath an oblong, wing-shaped bract; the leaves are roughly heart-shaped



**Limes**



Flowers and fruits are in cylindrical catkins; the leaves are oval to oblong



**Willows**

### Key 6 – step 16



Flowers are in small clusters; the fruit is a seed surrounded by a papery wing



**Elms**



Flowers are in slender, hanging catkins; the fruit is a nut



**go to step 17**

### Key 6 – step 17



Leaves hairy on both surfaces; fruits are solitary or in clusters of a few; each nut is wrapped in a leafy sheath



**Hazels**



Leaves hairy only on veins on the underside; fruits are in a hanging catkin, paired nuts are attached to a large, 3-lobed, bract

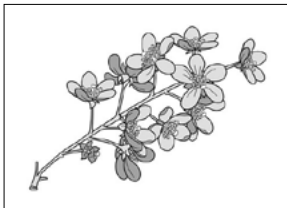


**Hornbeam**



## Key 7: cherry trees

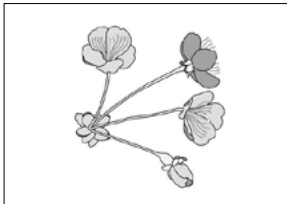
### Key 7 - step 1



Flowers or fruits arranged in roughly cylinder-shaped spikes, 11 or more per spike



**go to step 2**

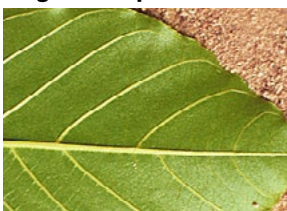


Flowers or fruits on their own or in clusters of 10 or fewer



**go to step 3**

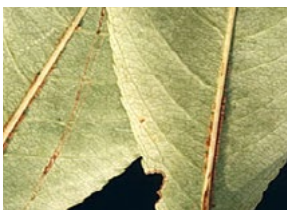
### Key 7 - step 2



Leaves hairless or with white hairs along midrib, sometimes only where veins join; flowers 10-15mm across



**Bird cherries**

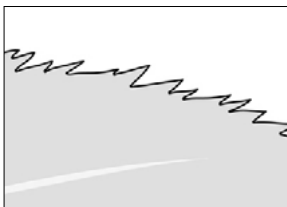


Leaves have rusty or orange hairs underneath, each side of the midrib; flowers 8mm across



**Rum cherry**

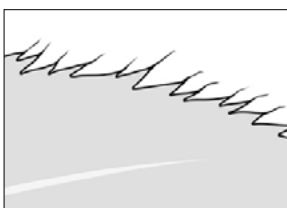
### Key 7 - step 3



Flower and leaf stalks densely hairy; leaf edges have pointed teeth



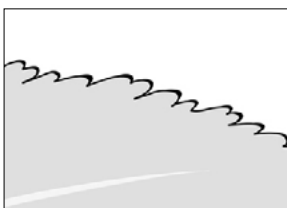
**go to step 4**



Flower and leaf stalks hairless or almost hairless; leaf edges have pointed teeth, often with thin, bristle-like tips



**go to step 5**



Flower and leaf stalks hairless; leaf edges have blunt or round teeth, often with a claw-shaped gland at the tip



**go to step 6**

### Key 7 – step 4



Sepal edges are toothed; leaves hairless on the upper side with hairy veins on the underside



**Spring cherries**



Sepal edges not toothed; leaves hairy on both surfaces



**Fuji cherry**

### Key 7 – step 5



Bark on trunk and branches very glossy, purplish-brown and peeling in thin, copper-brown strips



**Tibetan cherry**



Bark mostly dull grey or brown, sometimes peeling to reveal shiny red-brown on the trunk



**Japanese cherries**

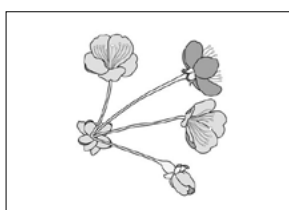
### Key 7 – step 6



Flowers less than 20mm across, on stalks up to 15mm long, not arising from a central point; fruit less than 10mm long



**St Lucie cherries**

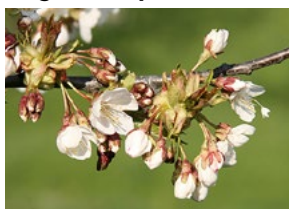


Flowers more than 20mm across, on stalks more than 15mm long, arising from a central point; fruit more than 10mm long



**go to step 7**

### Key 7 – step 7



Flowers cup-shaped; leaves dull on the upper side, sparsely hairy on the underside



**Wild cherry**



Flowers saucer-shaped; leaves glossy on the upper side, hairless on the underside



**Morello cherry**

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