

Explore the Diversity of the Living Collection

# BARKING UP THE RIGHT TREE

Sheryl White, Visitor Education Assistant

Through the seasons, from bud to nut, bark is a constant. It is a key way to identify a tree, particularly in winter. The outer bark of dead tissue covers and protects the inner bark, where tissue lives and grows. Waste products from the tree's metabolism, in the form of tannins, gums, and resins, are deposited in the outer bark. This outer bark might be smooth or rough, bumpy, fissured, or peeling. On any individual tree, the bark's characteristics are a result of the tree's growth, as well as external forces such as weather, injury, or disease. This means the bark is continually changing. At the Arboretum, a diverse and extensive collection of woody plants offers a wide range of distinct bark characteristics. Here are six that will get you barking for more!

Arnold Arboretum Archives



Start with *Stewartia pseudocamellia* (Japanese stewartia), on the lawn in front of the Hunnewell Visitor Center. This Asian native has lovely flowers and fantastic fall foliage, but best of all is its year-round, exfoliating bark. The bark peels off from the trunk and is a natural part of the tree's growth pattern. The stewartia's bark peels in very thin patches resulting in a camouflage effect. Shades of warm grey, rose, buff, light green, and cream cover the surface, flowing and merging in smooth eddies of color.

Follow Meadow Road to our tallest tree, *Acer saccharinum* (silver maple). Long, loose strips of bark pull away from the surface of the trunk. As these vertical pieces lift off, a warm gold surface is revealed beneath the silver-gray. This pattern covers the main trunk as well as the mature branches.



Maggie Redfern

Sheryl White



With its rich cinnamon, orange, and brown bark, *Acer griseum* (paperbark maple) seems to glow. In the maple collection along Willow Path, once the leaves have fallen, the paperbark maple stands out like a beacon. Native to the mountains of central China, the Arnold Arboretum specimens are the largest and oldest in the United States. The bark exfoliates in thin, paper-like sections, curling away from the surface.

The genus *Prunus* (cherry) offers particularly interesting and attractive bark, dotted with lenticels. Lenticels are tiny holes in the bark that allow gases, especially oxygen, to move between the internal tissues and the air. They are slightly raised and horizontal, looking like pimples or blisters. One of the cherries in the Bradley Rosaceous Collection worth a close look is *Prunus serrulata* 'Washi-No-O' with rich-brown, smooth, burnished bark accented by networks of lenticels.



Eric Youngerman



Bob Mayer

Our native *Diospyrus virginiana* (common persimmon) exhibits yet another type of bark, made up of pronounced scales. These small, irregularly shaped blocks are divided by furrows and have an overall appearance of hundreds of squares and rectangles. Colors of gray, black and rust emerge in this rough, textured bark.

Many trees in the *Betula* (birch) genus are recognized for their unusual and striking bark. *Betula nigra* (river birch) is a native with exfoliating bark. Layers peel and curl all over the trunk revealing patches of cream, rust, and gray. As the river birch matures, the main trunk becomes predominantly dark gray and brown, no longer peeling in big sheets, but developing a scaly surface with furrows that run vertically. Upper limbs, especially new growth, retain the delicate colors and patterns that emerge as the thin sheets of bark peel away.



Julie Warsow

This is just a glimpse of the many woody plants at the Arboretum with interesting bark. Take a free tour with Curator Michael Dosmann to see these and more up close! See page 16 for details.

### Barking Mad!

WAL 206

Michael Dosmann, Curator, Arnold Arboretum  
Sat Oct 31 1:00–2:30pm [HB]