



# What Plant is This?

## Teaching Invasive Plant ID



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**Objective** – To make learning how to identify plants a fun and painless activity! Use these guidelines to teach basic ID terms and then put them to use identifying invasive plants in the field.

### Background:

The key to teaching successful plant identification skills is to teach to the level of the group. Engaged or advanced groups might be able to handle the difference between bi-pinnate, pinnate, and palmate leaves, while younger or less engaged groups might get stuck on toothed vs. smooth leaf edges. Luckily, there are a variety of ways to teach ID skills and many can be adapted for multiple situations.

Below you will find some background information, resources, and a sheet designed to help educators teach invasive plant ID.

### Supplies (optional):

- Pruners (to look at pith)
- Magnifying Glass
- “What plant is this” ID Sheet
- Field Guide

### Activity:

1. Begin by looking closely at a plant. Handing out plant samples can be an easy way for everyone to participate. Start by asking participants what they notice first.
2. Build on their responses. For example, if they say the leaves are green, ask them to compare the color to other leaves on neighboring plants (are they dark green, yellow-green, etc?).
3. If they don't hit all the ID points, guide them towards the answers. For example, instead of telling the group “the leaves are rough” pass around some leaves and ask how they would describe the texture.
4. The main characteristics to go over are:
  - a. Leaf edge: smooth, serrated, lobed
  - b. Leaf shape: egg shaped, oval, round, etc.
  - c. Leaf arrangement: opposite, alternate, whorled
  - d. Leaf and bark texture: smooth, rough, soft, etc.
  - e. Leaf and bark color
  - f. Pith color
5. Different groups will be able to go more or less in depth with ID terms depending on their age, background, and level of engagement. It's important not to overwhelm a group that is struggling with the basics.
6. Many participants will point out flowers and berries. While these are useful, they will not be present on all specimens, especially young ones.
7. After going over ID terms, ask participants to locate an example of the species they learned on. After they find an example, ask them how they know, encouraging the use their new ID vocabulary.

Additional Resources: <http://store.msuextension.org/publications/agandnaturalresources/mt201304ag.pdf>

# What Plant is This?

Start by asking "what do you notice about this plant?". Use the questions below to help highlight these useful ID characteristics. (Hint: comparing 2 species can be helpful!)

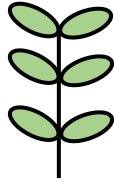
## Arrangement

*How are the leaves arranged on the branch?*



Alternate

VS.



Opposite

## Leaf Shape

*What shape are the leaves?*

Round                      Teardrop  
Egg-shaped                Oval  
Pointed tip

*What size are the leaves?*

Small, medium, large

## Bark

*What does the bark look like?*

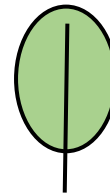
Smooth                      Lenticels  
Rough                        Color  
Peeling                        Cambium color

## Edge

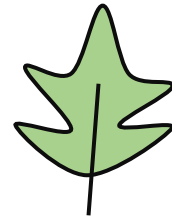
*What does the edge of the leaf look like?*



Toothed/  
Serrated



Smooth



Lobed

## Pith

*Cut a branch. What does the pith look like?*

Hollow    Solid    Color?

## Fruits, Thorns, & Flowers

*Does the plant have flowers?*

Color                      Shape  
Smell

*Does the plant have fruits?*

Few or many?  
Color?

*Does the plant have thorns?*

## Texture

*How do the leaves feel?*

Rough                      Soft  
Hairy                        waxy  
Smooth

## Woody vs. Herbaceous

*Is the plant woody or herbaceous?*

*Do you notice anything else about the plant?*