

# Woodcrest Villa Nature Trail & Arboretum

<http://rhodyman.net/WCV>

January 2023 Newsletter

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*Woodcrest Villa Arboretum is Dedicated To Those Recognized with Trees*

## The Sycamore: A Tree That Stands Out In Winter

Sycamore, Buttonwood, or American Plane Tree are all names for the same tree, *Platanus occidentalis*. It is a large stately deciduous tree that especially stands out in winter with its white bark that glows in the winter sun. It is native throughout the East Coast and extends into the Mid-West. It is commonly found along streams and in slow draining areas.

This is the only native tree with patchwork bark that glows white in the winter sun. As Sycamores grow, the bark doesn't stretch or crack, it just flakes off revealing the new white layer of bark underneath.

It is commonly seen along Lancaster County's streams and is most visible in winter. Notable examples are the white branches you see along the banks of the Susquehanna River, especially when you cross the river on US 30 or PA 462. It can be seen bordering other streams as you drive north on US 222. Across Harrisburg Pike from our pickleball court is a beautiful example.

There are Sycamores on the WCV Campus. Two are labeled along the Nature Trail, one near Swarr Run between markers D & E and the other bordering the grassy area between markers F & G. Another Sycamore is planted in the Arboretum as a memory tree for Lorie Hartman Sullivan. This tree is actually a hybrid of the American Planetree with the Oriental Planetree called the London Planetree. It is the preferred cultivar today due to its resistance to diseases that



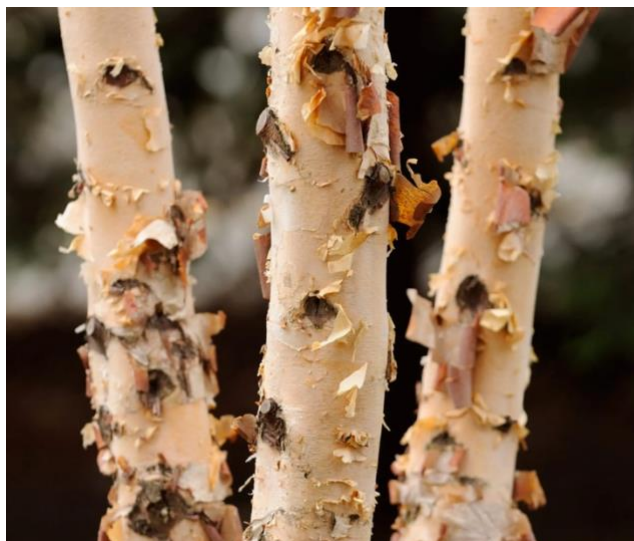
threaten the American Planetree. This cultivar has proven to be one of the most popular urban trees in the world. It is a strong tree which tolerates urban pollution. Its white bark in winter gives it year around appeal. It also makes it easy to identify. The bark is actually an olive-green color, but flakes off revealing the white inner bark. The white is most visible on the upper branches in winter. It is not to be confused with the paper birch which is a truly white barked tree native to the Northern US and Canada. The paper birch looks totally different, being smaller

and much more symmetrical. The paper birch is frequently planted as a landscape tree. Its white bark tends to peel back while the sycamore's bark turns dark and flakes off (exfoliates) forming a patchwork appearance.

In most trees, a bud forms in the crotch where the leaf attaches to the tree. The Sycamore doesn't do this. The bud is only revealed when the previous year's leaf falls off, revealing a new bud forming inside the leaf stem.

The Sycamore is often criticized for being messy. The new leaves are covered by hairs that are shed as the leaves open. Some people are allergic to this fuzz. Then they shed a generous supply of leaves, seed balls, twigs, and strips of bark. Tiny hairs on the seed balls can irritate skin, and also can cause respiratory distress if inhaled by sensitive people.

## The River Birch: A Tree For All Seasons



Another tree that is easy to recognize in the winter is the River Birch. It is treasured for its cinnamon-colored bark that curls and peels (exfoliates) which is particularly noticeable in the winter. This native of wet areas of the deep South grows very well when planted in Lancaster County. Woodcrest uses it on campus as a landscape tree. It can be easily recognized beside the Viva entrance.

It is one of the very best shade trees, valued as a landscape tree for the colorful exfoliating bark. It is one of the most culturally adaptable and heat tolerant of the birches and a good substitute for pest-prone paper and white birches. Another appealing feature is the shimmering contrast when the leaves flutter (quake) in the wind, revealing a lower leaf surface of a different color than the upper surface.

The slender new twigs are a red-brown color, while thin branches are cinnamon-colored. Older branches may also be exfoliating – typically in shades of cream, light orange, and lavender. The branches are not brittle, so are not prone to wind or ice damage. Twig and branch die-back is not uncommon and these dead parts tend to be messy as they shed readily.

River birch is a medium to tall tree, growing 60-80 feet at maturity and about 40 wide. Trees

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typically live 50 -75 years. The trunk typically grows about 2 feet in diameter but occasionally will be much wider. This shade tree has highly symmetrical branching and upright pyramidal form. Although it naturally forms just a single trunk, it is frequently found in a clump form with two to five trunks per tree. It is sometimes overlooked because it doesn't have white bark, but it is widely admired for its fall color. Its lustrous dark green leaves of summer turn to a golden yellow in the fall. It has the best fall foliage of all birches.



### Donations

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**WCV Nature Trail & Arboretum**

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