



The Beauty of Bark

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In the lush green of summer, the bark of woody plants is barely noticeable. Winter in the midwest strips all that away, though, and invites us to pay more attention. A close look at the bark of many trees reveals far more intricacy and complexity than simple protection would require.

Although it takes many years for bark to reach its mature stage, some trees are worth planting for this characteristic alone. In some cases, the texture is so unique they can be identified simply by touch.

The following trees have very dramatic, noticeable bark:

Coffeetree: Few deciduous trees match the leafless beauty of coffeetree. Its coarse outline and stucco-like bark make it an eye catcher in the winter landscape.

Hackberry: The corky ridges and wart-like projections on the trunk and bigger branches of hackberry make it an easy tree to identify. (* Dave Titterington, owner of Wild Bird Habitat, says a hackberry in his backyard is the best suet feeder he has... he simply rubs suet into the deep ridges.)

Birch: Several types of birch trees have exfoliating bark. The paper birch, which is native along the Niobrara River, has a chalky-white bark that peels into thin paper-like layers. The river birch, which is common in eastern Nebraska, has an orange to cinnamon brown bark that peels freely when young.

Lacebark Pine: As its name implies the bark on this tree exfoliates (much like sycamore) in a smooth patchwork of lighter and darker shades of gray and gray-brown.

Yellowwood: The gray bark on mature trees is very smooth and gray.

Sycamore and London Planetree: These two trees are very closely related and both have smooth bark that exfoliates to expose gray, brown and creamy white layers in a mottled patchwork pattern.

Persimmon: Persimmon has a thick, dark (almost black) bark deeply divided into very distinctive small blocks.

Quaking Aspen: The smooth greenish-white to cream-colored bark of quaking aspen is a real treat in the western Nebraska landscape. The bark is especially attractive against an evergreen backdrop or dark-colored home.

Baldcypress: Shaggy, cinnamon-colored bark stands out against light green needles. In mature trees, it peels off in long strips and is further accented by the low, flared trunk and strong branching structure.

Corneliancherry dogwood: Scaly, exfoliating bark is a mix of gray and tan.

Shagbark Hickory: Like its name implies, the bark of this hickory exfoliates in long, shaggy strips. There is no mistaking this tree in Nebraska's eastern hardwood forest.