

Adopt a Tree!

By Linda Butler



The signs of spring are beginning to show! Grass is greening, bulbs are blooming, trees are budding. Now is the perfect time to adopt a tree. You can't take a tree home with you, of course, but you can visit and observe a tree in its environment and see how it changes over the next few weeks and months.

You can adopt your own tree or adopt (and observe) a tree together as a family. It can be in your yard, a neighbor's yard, a park, or along a trail. It should be accessible, as you'll want to visit your tree every week or two.

Once you've chosen your tree, draw a picture of it, photograph it. Both drawing and photographing a tree are valuable. Drawing calls for close observation, photography records the tree in precise detail. Notice its general shape. Some trees are now beginning to blossom or leaf out. Others are dormant. I recommend adopting and observing a deciduous tree, as they show a much more dramatic seasonal change than do evergreens.

What does your tree look like? Does it have any buds, flowers, developing leaves? What is the basic shape of the branches? Is your tree tall and thin? Short and spreading? Does it have a lot of little branches? One or two main branches? Do the branches reach up? Do some bend down? What is the bark like? Is it smooth, rough? Does the bark have a smell? Can you put your arms around the trunk? Does it take more than one person to put their arms around the trunk? Can you hear any sounds from your tree? Does the wind make a sound with your tree?

Why did you choose your tree?

What do you like best about your tree?

One good way to record your observations is to finish these sentences:

My tree looks like...

My tree feels like...

My tree sounds like...

As you look at your tree consider these questions: (Some of these questions may be better answered on subsequent visits.)

How do I know this tree is alive? That it's healthy? (Do you see any signs of injury or disease on the tree? Dead or broken branches? Is any bark missing? Sap oozing out of the bark could mean the tree has insect problems.)

What main purpose is this tree for? (shade? Fruit? If so, what kind? As a windbreak?)

Is there any evidence of animals visiting your tree? (bark robbed off, low twigs eaten by deer, birds or bird nests, squirrels, etc.) Remember to check for insects, worms, spiders in or under your tree.

Look around your tree. What kind of environment (habitat) does it have? Is it mostly alone? With other trees? Are the surrounding trees similar or different? Is there lawn under the tree? Weeds? Sidewalk or cement?

Are you able to see any of your tree's roots, or evidence of them? (Is the ground uneven where a root is growing?)

Is it the largest or smallest tree in the area?

What do the leaves look like? Does it have fruit, nuts, seeds?

Make a rubbing of your tree's bark and keep that in your journal.



Every time you visit your tree, make a note of the changes you see in your tree. Try to photograph your tree from the same spot and compare changes from one photo to the next. Are the leaves growing? How do they change from week to week? Is there more shade each week? Does the tree sound different with more leaves? Does the weather change the sight or sound of the tree? How does it sound in the wind? Have you visited your tree in the rain? How much water comes through the canopy (leafy top of the tree)? If it snows, how much does the tree bend under the weight of it?

Look under your tree. What is growing there and how does it change each time you visit?

Are you able to identify what kind of tree it is? (Books, neighbors who know, and online resources can help with this.)

The Pleasant Grove Library has many books on trees. Here are just a few: "Trees" by Peter Mellett; "Trees" by Jason Cooper; "Trees of Utah" by Sherman Brough; "Trees of Pleasant Grove" by Lisa Harmer; "Trees: A Rooted History" by Wojciech Grajkowski; "National Audubon Society first Field Guide: Trees" by Brian Cassie, "Extreme Trees: And How they Got that Way" by Ellen Lawrence

Utah State University has excellent online resources about trees, including tree identification resources <https://forestry.usu.edu/>