

Wachusett's Green Giants

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
Wachusett Mountain State Reservation



This guide showcases some of the most-easily observed species of trees that you can find at Wachusett Mountain State Reservation.

Wachusett Mountain is home to over 40 different species of trees. Thanks to a protected environment, many of these trees have reached maturity and show impressive signs of age. These green giants are essential for people, climate and wildlife.

The reservation has over 200 acres of extremely rare old-growth forest, the largest area in Massachusetts of trees that have never been cut. As a result, there is a broad diversity of tree species in their natural state.

The importance of forests cannot be underestimated, and those found at Mount Wachusett Reservation are crucial to the health of the planet, providing clean air, clean water, carbon storage and biodiversity. With the stewardship of the public, they will continue to benefit future generations.

Some places to walk and observe a mix of different trees are the Bicentennial Trail, the High Meadow Trail, and the Jack Frost Trail.

Yellow Birch

Yellow Birch (*Betula allegheniensis*)

Like all birches, the bark has thin horizontal markings called “lenticels” and it has a shiny yellowish or silvery-gray appearance. As the tree ages, the bark separates into papery curly strips. The leaves are 3 to 5 inches long with teeth along the edges. Crushed twigs and leaves have a slight wintergreen aroma, and the bark and wood of Yellow Birch was formerly harvested to extract the oil, used to flavor candy and medicines. You can find this tree in many places and it is an important component of mature forests. It can easily be viewed along the lower section of the Bicentennial Trail.



Eastern Hemlock

Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*)

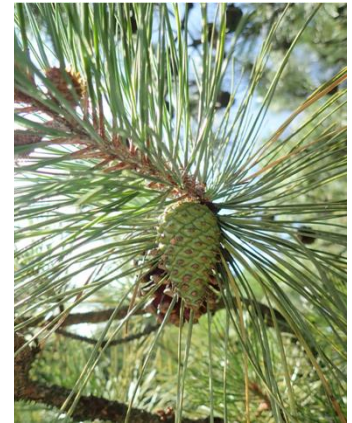
The Eastern Hemlock is an evergreen with a distinct conical shape. The leaves are needles about half an inch long, dark green above with two white stripes below. The bark is smooth and grayish green when young, becoming reddish brown and deeply furrowed with age. When you enter a hemlock grove, you experience deep shade, and, in warmer weather, you will feel a drop in the temperature. In fact, Hemlocks create a microclimate that produces an environment for plants, fungi, and animals not found elsewhere. A perfect place to experience the quiet magic of a hemlock grove is on Jack Frost trail, between the Lower Link Trail and the High Meadow Trail.



Pitch Pine

Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigida*)

The rough, deeply furrowed bark forms broad scaly ridges. The stiff needles, three to five inches long, are grouped in bundles of three. The short, egg-shaped cones stay on the tree for several years, making it easy to identify. Pitch Pines are adapted to grow in dry, sandy conditions and form unique forest communities. An excellent place to see pitch pines is on the Semuhenna Trail; especially on the summit road where Semuhenna crosses the road, just after the juncture of Semuhenna and West Side trails.



Shagbark Hickory

Shagbark Hickory (*Carya ovata*)

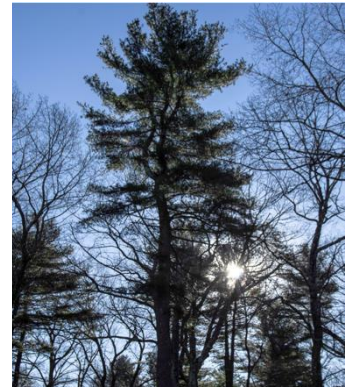
The long, thin, narrow strips of light gray outer bark make this one of the most unmistakable trees in our forest. The leaves are compound, roughly a foot long, and made of five leaflets, each 3 to 7 inches long. In autumn the leaves turn golden-brown. Hickory trees produce nuts that are sought after by many wild animals, from squirrels to black bears. Some of the best examples of hickory trees in the park are along the Loop Trail from the Bicentennial Trail to the Mountain House Trail.



Eastern White Pine

Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*)

These are the tallest northeastern conifers; in fact, White Pines are the tallest tree species in the northeast, with some individuals in Massachusetts exceeding 170 feet in height! It is a familiar evergreen tree, with needles in bundles of five. The bark is grayish brown, becoming deeply furrowed with age. The White Pine is well known as building material used by humans, but the cones also produce seeds that are an important source of wildlife food. A good place to appreciate this magnificent tree is along Echo Lake Road to Administration Road.



Sugar Maple

Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*)

Perhaps the most quintessential New England tree, its boiled sap is the source of maple sugar and syrup, a use taught to the colonists by the indigenous people. The leaf has a characteristic shape that many people are familiar with – the Canadian flag features it. Sugar Maples provide cooling shade in the summer and display striking multi-colored foliage in the fall. To enjoy these trees, hike High Meadow Trail from the juncture with Bicentennial Trail to the juncture with Jack Frost Trail.



White Ash

White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*)

The gray bark of the White Ash forms deep furrows that often appear diamond shaped. The leaves are compound, and the branching is opposite. The wood is dense and light and has been used to make items such as baseball bats, snowshoes, tennis rackets, hockey sticks, axe handles, and canoe paddles. The White Ash grows to be a large tree, tall and wide in girth. To get a good look at these trees, walk along the Bicentennial Trail near the Visitor Center, where there are several mature White Ash trees.



Northern Red Oak

Northern Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)

The bark forms long, flattened vertical ridges, sometimes interspersed with red inner bark. The leaves are variable in size, usually around half a foot long, and have wavy lobes that end in points. The acorns are an important food source for wildlife, including wild turkeys, deer, bears, and many other creatures. This is one of the most common trees at Wachusett Mountain and can be found along most trails. An excellent place to see large Red Oaks is on Semuhenna Trail near the juncture with Harrington Trail. Many oaks of various ages and sizes can also be easily seen along the upper stretch of Old Indian Trail.



White Spruce

White Spruce (*Picea glauca*)

This tree is sometimes called Cat Spruce, as the crushed needles give off an unpleasant “skunky” odor. The needles on spruces are very stiff, unlike the soft needles of Hemlock trees, but deer, rabbits, grouse, and other animals browse the foliage in winter. The wood is used as lumber for construction, and is also valued for musical instruments, including guitar and violin bodies. Although it is native farther north, it has been planted in various places in our area. Look for it outside the Visitor Center.



Striped Maple

Striped Maple (*Acer pensylvanicum*)

This is a small tree that rarely reaches 30 feet in height, but it is one of the most interesting trees found at Wachusett. The bark is a bright green with white stripes, and it actually photosynthesizes, a function usually only associated with leaves. A second common name for this tree is Moosewood, presumably because the bark and tender buds are a favorite food of Moose. A third name is Goosefoot Maple, as the leaves bear a resemblance to the shape of a goose’s foot. Striped Maple is common on many trails, especially Bicentennial Trail; look for the characteristic green bark and unique leaves.

