



American Beech
Fagus grandifolia



TREE OF THE MONTH

American Beech • *Fagus grandifolia*

ALSO KNOWN AS: NORTH AMERICAN BEECH

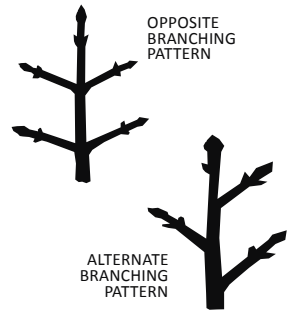
American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) is known for its smooth, light gray-brown bark and an alternate branching pattern. Native to most of eastern and central North America, smooth beech bark is often used for lovers' inscriptions and is eye-catching even in dense forests. Part of the *Fagaceae* family, beeches can grow over 100 feet tall. One of the largest beeches recorded fell in 1916, bearing the inscription "*D. Boone Cilled A Bar On Tree In Year 1760.*" The tree's girth was measured at 28.5 feet and the US Forest Service estimated that it was 365 years old.

Notable for their ovate leaves with toothed (serrated) margins, beeches often hold on to their leaves through most of the winter in northeastern North America. These persistent leaves make a soft rustling as the wind moves through the forest even in the depths of January. In the autumn, the leaves change from deep yellow to chestnut brown. Even when green in the spring and summer, beech leaves have a papery texture all year.

At about 40 years old beeches begin to produce fruit, or mast. Wrapped in yellow to light brown oval husks that are covered in spikes, the nuts are incredibly calorie-rich. Beech nuts are an important source of food for many wildlife species, and are especially favored by black bear.

American beech roots are broad and shallow, absorbing most of the soil's moisture beneath the tree. Their saplings are extremely shade tolerant. In mature forests, beeches can often form dense stands that exclude other species.

Beech wood is used for furniture, tool handles, flooring, veneer, baskets, and fuel. Beech bark and leaves are used for textile dyes.



Beech commonly associate with sugar maple, yellow birch, and eastern hemlock. The largest, tallest beeches prefer rich soils with good moisture.

Beech buds are an important part of the early spring diet for many species, including sparrows.

Humans, from both native and colonial communities, have used all parts of beech trees. The young leaves are edible, the nuts are edible and can be pressed to provide rich oil that can be used for both cooking and fuel. Some communities use the ground nuts as a coffee substitute or flour, often used in coffee cakes.



Tree of the Month is a collaboration between BEAT, the City of Pittsfield, Pittsfield Tree Watch, and the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation's Greening the Gateway Cities Program. Find out more at thebeatnews.org.