



Pussy Willow
Salix discolor



Weeping Willow
Salix babylonica



White Willow
Salix alba

TREE OF THE MONTH **THREE WILLOWS** • Willows are alternately branching shrubs and trees that thrive in moist habitats. Their deciduous foliage is usually long and lance-like with small teeth on the margins, and distinguishing species by leaf difficult. In winter, one easy-to-spot willow characteristic is the buds that hug the twig. Unfortunately for identification, however, willows often hybridize with each other. These are three of the most common willow trees found in northeastern North America.

Many willow species have the compound *salicin*, an anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving agent, in their bark. Teas and other medicines made from willow bark have been used for centuries by cultures around the world to treat pain. The active ingredient in aspirin, salicylic acid, has been historically derived from willow bark.

Pussy Willow • *Salix discolor*

ALSO KNOWN AS: AMERICAN PUSSY WILLOW, GLAUCUS WILLOW

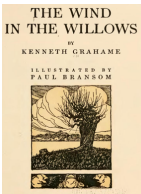
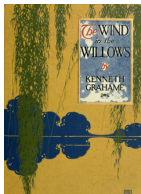
A small tree or shrub, pussy willows are fast growing, short-lived, and usually reach no taller than 25 feet. They have male and female plants. The early spring sight of branches with their fuzzy catkins are actually the male flowers beginning to bloom. The fuzz is tiny hairs that insulate the nascent flowers from cold weather. In full bloom, the male stamens project far above the fuzz. Female flowers have smaller, light green pistils emerging from the fuzz and are much less noticeable.

Pussy willows have the largest and roundest buds of these three willows.

Weeping Willow • *Salix babylonica*

ALSO KNOWN AS: BABYLON WEEPING WILLOW

A medium to large tree, growing up to 50 feet tall, weeping willows have stout trunks with crowns marked by their drooping twigs. One of the most glorious sights in New England is a weeping willow's chartreuse twigs in late winter.



Early *The Wind in the Willows* covers

TOP: natural shape of the tree.
BOTTOM: a 'coppiced' tree that is extremely

pruned annually to promote lots of new, supple growth. This practice is common among basketmakers and in the Netherlands.

White Willow • *Salix alba*

ALSO KNOWN AS: WEEPING WILLOW

The largest of these three willows, white willows can reach 80 feet tall. Native to Europe, Asia, and Northern Africa, white willows were brought to North America by colonists in the 1700s. They are now naturalized in many parts of the continent. Leaves have lighter undersides covered in downy hairs, lending the tree its common name. Like many willows, white willow flowers are important early sources of nectar for pollinators, and more than 200 insect species are associated with this tree. Many Native American tribes have used white willow branches for multiple uses.



Tree of the Month is part of the 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.