DISCOVER FRUITS & NUTS
of the Hill Country

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Fruit is the wondrous package of future generations for a plant species. It is the part of the plant that holds the seed of the next generation. In many cases a plant family shares a particular fruit type. Some fruits may be persistent on the tree during fall-winter allowing identification even when leaves have fallen. Different fruit types involve different methods of reaching new ground such as gravity, wind, water (floating) or wildlife transport.

Below is quick reference key to the basic types of fruits for woody species. Forbs and grasses also have similar types as well as others that are lighter to hitchhike rides on wind, fur or socks.

NOTE: This is a visual approach so keep in mind that each types represent a very basic clue. It is intended to show how some plants are grouped together. Therefore, do not think that all plants listed will have the extra look of the illustration. Additional clues would be needed for thes

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FLESHY FRUIT has a covering of pulp that is fleshy when mature.
- Size is relative, however, arrangement & location on plant are important clues.
- To distinguish between these 3 types you will need to cut open to see the seeds.
- Transport to new ground is most often by wildlife through ingestion of fruit and the "deposit" of hard seeds in new areas.

BERRY
has several to many seeds, but lacks a single pit or core.

Blue:
- Rusty Black-haw Viburnum

Black:
- Texas persimmon
- Gum Bumelia

Purple-black:
- Carolina buckthorn
- Elderberry
- Vervain Family: lantana, Am. Beautyberry, vitex (exotic)

Red:
- Agarita & Tx Barberry
- Honeysuckle: Coral, White bush, Indian currant
- Madrone
- Prickly pear cactus
- Turks cap (forb)

DRUPE
has one seed or pit.

Blue: *Ashe juniper = fleshy cone

Purple-black:
- Condalias
- Ash F: forestiera, ligustrums
- Black-cherry & plums
- Mexican silktassel

Red: hackberries
- Holly F: Possumhaw, Yaupon
- Spicebush
- Sumac F: Evergreen, Fragrant, TX pistache, Chinese pistache, Smoketree (drupelets)

White: *Poison Ivy (Sumac F)
- Rough-Leaf Dogwood

Yellow-orange: Anaqua
- Soapberry
- Chinaberry (exotic)

POME
has a seedy core.

- Rose Family (not all) apples,pear, hawthorns, pryacantha
* *Apricot, peach, plum are drupes with a pit seed*

ODD FLESHY FRUIT award goes to the Mulberry Family.
The fruit is an aggregate of tiny drupes where the seeds are on the outside.
   Red mulberries ripen black.The Osage Orange is an aggregate fruit that looks like a green, warty "grapefruit".
* Figs have inside seeds.

CAUTION: Just because wildlife can eat the various fruits of different plants does NOT imply that they are edible for humans. Many plants have toxic fruits that could be fatal if ingested by humans.

DRY FRUIT may have an outer hull that splits open OR not.

- Size is relative, however, arrangement & location on plant of the fruit are important clues.
- Transport for nuts and seeds inside capsules may include gravity, water (floating), or wildlife (i.e. squirrels that bury the seeds). If wildlife eats the seed (nut) itself, it is destroyed.
- Transport for samaras is by wind. The wings act like helicopters.
- Transport for legumes includes wildlife that ingest the pulpy pods but cannot digest the hard seeds inside.

ACORN is a smooth shell nut with a cap.
Only Oaks produce acorns.
Note shape and size plus cap.

RED OAKS: acorns take 2 years to mature
• inside of cap is dense with hairs or fuzz
= Blackjack, Texas Red/Spanish oak, Shumard

WHITE OAKS: acorns mature in one year
• inside of cap is smooth
= Bur (huge), Chinkapin, Lacey, Lacey, Post, Vasey, Monterey

* Acorns are valuable wildlife food.

NUT is covered by a husk.
The inside seed splits in 2.
In HC = the Walnut Family

Husks that don't split open; green husk looks like a tennis ball.
= Walnuts (use size of seed for species)

Husks that split open; (suture lines are present during growth)
= Pecans & Hickories

NUTLETS: Basswood & Texas Colubrina

SAMARA is a dry, winged seed (that doesn't split open).
Note: shape, margins, texture, season present to separate species.

SINGLE SAMARA

Small, oval samaras
ELM (*Ulmus* sp.) alternate branches

  • American: late spring
  • Cedar: late summer
  • Slippery: riparian
  • Winged: late spring, reddish

"Penny-size" samara, tan
  • Wafer Ash/ Hop-tree
    (*Ptelea trifoliata*)

Linear samaras, hang in panicles;

opposite branches = Ash (*Fraxinus*)
  • Berlandier: May
  • Green
  • Texas: summer
  • Velvet: Sept.

DOUBLE SAMARAS

= MAPLE FAMILY: branches opposite. Includes Box-elder.

CAPSULE has a dry, hard outer shell that splits open with one or more carpel (chamber) where seed is located.

• Tiny → small, 3-part carpels: Snowbells, Toothache Tree; Spurges: crotons, Chinese Tallow (white capsules)
• 2-part capsule: Flame Acanthus, Witch-hazel
• 3-part capsule: Yuccas (flat black seeds); Castor Bean (spiny)
• 3-part black pod; hard shiny, black seeds with white "eye"
    = Mexican Buckeye
• Large tan capsule with 1-2 large, hard, shiny black seeds with white "eye" = Buckeyes (Yellow or Red)

POD opens along 2 linear sutures:

Pods with naked seeds = Legume Family.
Note length, thickness, shape (some have spines on margins). Seeds may be round, flat, oval.

• Eve's Necklace pod constricts around the inside seeds to look like a string of black pearls.

NOTE: many members of this family are edible, however, many are also poisonous to humans and livestock. Know your Beans.

POD with "winged" seeds:
• Trumpet-Creeper Family: Catalpa, Desert Willow, Yellow-bells
• Dogbane Family: Oleander
• Milkweed Family

OTHER FRUIT TYPES include:
• **Cones (inside seeds may be winged or not): pines,** Baldcypress, and
    Ashe juniper (blue berry is really a fleshy cone); [Magnolia is an aggregrate cone with red seeds]
• **Achene (dry, small, one-celled, one-seeded) in a ball:** Sycamore, Buttonbush