

Connecting Kids to Nature

Try this activity in a forest—a natural place to learn!

For over 30 years, Project Learning Tree® has used the forest as a “window” to help young people gain an awareness of the world around them and their place within it. Blending a walk in the forest with a fun and engaging PLT activity creates a powerful learning experience for children of all ages. Here’s one idea in a series from PLT that introduces the concept of **species characteristics**.



Activity 64: Looking at Leaves

In this activity, children will take a closer look at leaves and find out more about leaf characteristics and how leaves can be used to identify plants.

Doing the Activity

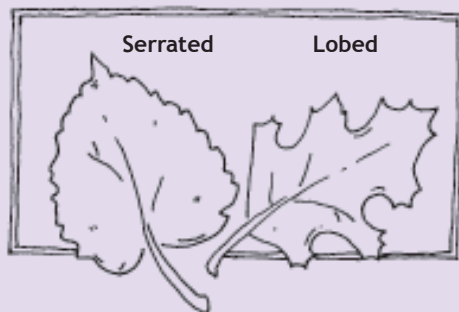
The next time you are in a forested area, have children collect leaves of various shapes, sizes, and colors from the ground. Conduct a comparison investigation by asking:

- What differences and similarities can you see?
- What do the leaves feel like? Do they have hairs? Or teeth?
- Can you find the tree that each leaf came from?

Explain that leaves can be used to identify trees. Try using a field guide to identify a tree. How many other trees can you find with this same type of leaf?

The edges or margins of leaves can provide clues to a tree’s identity. Another characteristic to identify a tree is the way its leaves are arranged on the twigs. Can you find **leaf margins** and **leaf arrangements** that match the images below?

Leaf Margins



Leaf Arrangements



Have children make prints of the leaves they collect. To make a leaf rubbing, place a leaf on a smooth, hard surface, vein side up, and cover it with a piece of paper. Rub a crayon back and forth across the paper, directly above the leaf. What do you see? The leaf’s margin and veins will appear on the paper as you rub.

Adapted from Activity 64: Looking At Leaves from Project Learning Tree’s PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide.

WEST VIRGINIA TREE FACT

Sassafras trees have three different shaped leaves—oval, mitten-shaped, and bi-lobed—all found on the same tree. This, combined with their well-known “root beer” smell makes the tree easy to identify.

Discover how PLT can help you teach... from nature!

- Attend a workshop near you to receive PLT activity guides, ideas, and materials
- Contact your West Virginia PLT State Coordinator, Cinda Francis, at cfrancis@wvadventures.net or toll-free at (888) 372-9663.



Project Learning Tree® (PLT)
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