

## TALKING TIMBER



## URBAN TREE TRAILS

**Martin Ansell** explores the attraction and educational value of tree trails in towns and cities across the UK



There are approximately 60 native tree species in the UK together with many species introduced from overseas, mostly over the last 400 years. Each tree is identified by its genus name followed by the species name. Genus names are often derived from Latin or Greek words. For example, the coniferous tree *Picea sitchensis*, is of the genus *Picea* (preceded by a capital letter *P*) and *Picea sitchensis* is the species (*sitchensis* alone is termed

the specific epithet). The common name of this tree is Sitka spruce, but it is also known as tideland spruce, coast spruce, and Menzies spruce amongst other names, hence the importance of the definitive species name.

Botanical gardens and arboreta are places where trees are identified and admired but many fine tree specimens can be found in urban settings. Busy city streets and public parks host some spectacular examples of outstanding and fascinating trees which are featured in urban tree trails in locations throughout the UK. A few examples of tree trails, all supported by online maps and informative guides, are described here.

Lurgan Park is located just south of Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland and a tree trail supported by the local borough council introduces 13 trees, the majority of which are deciduous, and some of which are located beside a lake. ([https://issuu.com/acdcdesign/docs/lurgan\\_park\\_trails\\_map](https://issuu.com/acdcdesign/docs/lurgan_park_trails_map))

Camperdown Tree Trail, on the outskirts of Dundee, is one of the National Tree Collections of Scotland ([www.ntcs.org.uk](http://www.ntcs.org.uk)). The trail visits 25 trees with relative rarities including katsura (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*), alerce (*Fitzroya cupressoides*) and Camperdown elm (*Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdownii'). (<https://www.dundee.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/camperdowntreetrail.pdf>)

Bute Park in the centre of Cardiff is said to possess the highest number of champion trees in any UK public park. There are three trails in southern, central and northern sections. Unusual species include a foxglove or princess tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*) and a weeping pink thorn (*Crataegus monogyna* 'Pendula Rosea'). (<https://bute-park.com/attraction/champion-tree-trail/>)

Other notable trails are in Brighton and Hove (<https://ticl.me/Brighton/headlines/14142/view>), the City of London (<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/assets/Things-to-do/tree-trails-walk.pdf>), Cambridge (<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/tree-trails>), Leeds (<https://leaf.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/86/2022/06/Leaflet-summer.pdf>), Leicester (<https://www.leicester.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/parks-and-open-spaces/management-and-maintenance/trees-and-woodlands/tree-trails/>) and Nottingham (<https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/media/kw2byifo/>)

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[woodthorpe-grange-park-tree-trail.pdf](https://www.bathurbantreescape.com/map).

I live in the City of Bath where Bath Urban Treescape has created 10 excellent tree trails: <https://www.bathurbantreescape.com/map>

The left-hand photograph features a buckeye tree (*Aesculus flava*) located in allotments adjacent to Royal Victoria Park. The yellow flowering horse chestnut is the state tree of Ohio which as a sapling was grafted onto a common horse chestnut resulting, in the mature tree, in two portions of trunk with very different textures.

The right-hand photograph features another striking tree noted for its beautiful multi-coloured bark. The hybrid strawberry tree (*Arbutus.x.andrachnoides*) can be found between the Royal Avenue and the Gravel Walk in Royal Victoria Park. The x in the species name denotes a hybrid cross between two tree species.

Finally, the cork oak (*Quercus suber*) is featured in my portrait photograph above. In southern Spain the bark is stripped on a nine-year cycle and cork is used for the manufacture of stoppers for bottles, thermal and acoustic panels and even thermal shields in spaceships.

In conclusion, in our UK streets and parks we can see the results of planting a wide spectrum of trees, many established well over 100 years ago. Urban tree trails open our eyes to the beauty and variety of trees with huge variations in their bark, leaves, flowers, seeds and fruit. ■

Below:

A buckeye tree  
(left) and a hybrid  
strawberry tree



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