

A Driving Tour of Charlottesville's Notable Trees

Welcome to the Notable Trees Driving Tour, presented by the Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards. The trees you will visit today are notable for their size, their history, and, in some cases, their rarity—especially in the face of pests and diseases that have put their species in jeopardy. Some of the trees are on private property. Please view them from a respectful distance, such as from the street or sidewalk. Although our tour provides detailed driving directions, having a map of Charlottesville in hand will make it easier to follow. All but one of the trees (out Rio Road) are within the city limits.

Tree 1: The Landmark [Sycamore](#) at Quarry Park

Our tour begins at the southern edge of Charlottesville near the interchange of Interstate 64 and State Route 20. From the Interstate exit ramps, head north on Route 20 and immediately enter the left lane. In the median you will see young trees that the Tree Stewards and our partners have planted in recent years as part of the Monticello Gateway project.

Enter the first turn lane on the left, and make a left turn onto Quarry Road. Be careful! This can be a busy stretch of highway, especially during rush hour. Proceed to Quarry Park on the left and park in the lot by the baseball field. You will see a large Sycamore—one of the city's most beloved public trees—down the hill beside Moores Creek. It was dedicated as a Landmark Tree on Arbor Day in 2013.

With its broad toothed leaves and peeling bark, revealing shades of gray, brown, and white, this iconic species is easily recognized and often found on the banks of rivers and streams. The trunk of this tree is nearly five feet in diameter, but it can get even larger. According to the Virginia Department of Forestry, this species has the largest trunk diameter of any North American hardwood.

Looking north, try to imagine the cattle farm that once occupied the hillside across the road. A nearby bridge provides access to a segment of the Rivanna Trail that affords a view of the city.

Tree 2: The [American Elm](#) at Sojourners Church

On Quarry Road, return to Route 20 North, which becomes Monticello Avenue. Turn left. Again, proceed cautiously. Traffic here can be heavy.

On Monticello Avenue, you will enter the Belmont neighborhood and pass Sojourners Church, a brick building on the left. Just past the church, turn left on Montrose Avenue. The magnificent American Elm, with its deeply furrowed bark and sky-sweeping canopy, is behind the church near its parking lot. Its stout trunk is more than 14 feet in circumference.

Before Dutch elm disease threatened to wipe out this species in the last century, *Ulmus americana* was a fixture of urban streetscapes, parks, school grounds and college campuses. We are fortunate to have this outstanding example still with us today.

Tree 3: The [American Elm](#) at Clark Elementary School

Return to Monticello Avenue and turn left. Just beyond the traffic light at Carlton Road, Clark Elementary School will appear in front of you as the street bends leftward. Take a sharp right onto Tufton Avenue, where on-street parking can usually be found. As you walk toward the school, look up to see another long-surviving American Elm to the left of the stairway leading to the school's south entrance.

Towering over Monticello Avenue, it was slated to be named a Landmark Tree on Arbor Day in 2020, but the Covid-19 pandemic prevented it from being recognized in a public ceremony.

This tree may have been planted when the George Rogers Clark School was built in 1931, making it well over 80 years old. The city helps ensure its continued survival by treating it to prevent Dutch elm disease.

Walk out from the school grounds to appreciate the full grandeur of this tree, which springs like a fountain from the hilltop. Also take some time to enjoy other trees in this leafy corner of Belmont. They include a row of Sycamores by the road, two beautiful Oaks at the back entrance to the school, and a large Sweetgum left of the school's main portico.

Tree 4: The Historic [Tulip Tree](#) at 2000 Marchant Street

Driving away from the school on Tufton Avenue, turn right at Monticello Road. Proceed one block to Carlton Road and turn left. Traffic can be heavy at this spot, so be patient.

At the next traffic light, take a right from Carlton Road onto Carlton Avenue. Continue to the intersection with Nassau Street and admire an impressive Catalpa tree near the southeast corner.

Continue to the intersection with Franklin Street. At that point, Carlton Avenue ends and Broadway Street begins. Proceed down Broadway past warehouses and other commercial buildings. Just before the road ends at Marchant Street, turn left into the driveway of a 19th century mansion that was recently renovated.

The Tulip Tree stands near the mansion. The building dates from 1840 and was the home of Henry Clay Marchant, president of the nearby Charlottesville Woolen Mills—a historic site undergoing extensive redevelopment.

With its tulip-shaped leaves and flowers, the Tulip Tree is a towering presence in urban landscapes and eastern forests. It typically grows from 90 to 110 feet in height but can reach nearly 200 feet. Although it is often called a Tulip Poplar or Yellow Poplar, this tree is not a Poplar at all. It's actually a member of the Magnolia family.

Tree 5: [Hackberry](#) at 1712 East Market St.

Return to Broadway and retrace your route to Franklin Street, then turn right at the stop sign. The road will narrow to one lane as you drive under a railroad trestle. At East Market Street, turn right into the Woolen Mills neighborhood. You will find a large Hackberry tree down the hill on the right.

This tough, fast-growing tree is more often found in the countryside than on the street side in our area, although in some communities it has been planted as a boulevard tree to replace disease-stricken American elms. It is easily identified by its rough bark—sometimes described as “warty” or “corky.” Its fruits are edible, turning orange-red to dark purple when ripe in the fall, but watch out for the hard seed in the middle. The fruits and seeds often remain on the tree over the winter and are eagerly sought after by birds and small mammals, as well as human foragers.

Trees 6: [Black Willow](#) on East Market Street

Drive down East Market to the historic Woolen Mills Chapel, built in 1887 by and for the mill workers on land donated by the company. Make a U-turn at Riverside Avenue. Retracing your route, just past the chapel, look to the right at 1809 East Market to observe a sizeable Black Willow with a full crown.

The water-loving tree is practically growing in the stream of this urban farm. The owners have protected the tree from invasive vines and traffic, and have enjoyed its shade for some 20 years.

Also called the Swamp Willow, the Black Willow has soil-binding roots that help protect stream banks from erosion. A chemical extracted from willow bark, called salicin, provides fever and pain relief similar to aspirin, now a synthetic product.

Tree 7: [Silver Maple](#) at 1604 East Market Street

Continue driving and look to the left at 1604 East Market. The old Silver Maple, standing amid other vegetation, is a good example of how the bark of this species becomes shaggy with age. Silver Maples also can be easily identified by their leaves, which are sharply pointed and deeply lobed. They flash like silver in the wind, giving the tree its common name.

One of many vintage structures in the Woolen Mills neighborhood, the home on this property was built in 1890.

Tree 8: [White Walnut](#) at East High Street and Gillespie Avenue

Continue on East Market to Meade Avenue and take a right. Proceed to the traffic light on East High Street and turn left. Just past a gas station and convenience store, turn right onto Gillespie Avenue.

Behind the gas station, you will find a tree rarely seen in Charlottesville. It's a White Walnut, or Butternut, a tree typically found in mountain coves of Appalachia. It is far less common here than the Black Walnut, a familiar sight around town and along rural roadsides.

It's not hard to tell the trees apart. Black Walnuts produce big, round nuts covered in green husks, while White Walnut husks are oblong. The bark is different as well. Black Walnut bark is dark and deeply furrowed, while White Walnut bark is a lighter, ashen color and somewhat smoother.

Both trees are "allelopathic." They produce a chemical, called juglone, that suppresses the growth of other plants nearby.

Tree 9: [Dawn Redwood](#) at 619 Grove Ave.

Driving away from East High Street on Gillespie Avenue, take a quick left onto Poplar Street. Look up to see another unusual tree in Charlottesville: a Metasequoia, or Dawn Redwood.

Even when its limbs are bare in wintertime, this deciduous conifer strikes a distinctive profile, a tall pyramid against the sky. The deep folds of its trunk also set it apart.

Moreover, this tree is considered a living fossil. In the age of the dinosaurs, its range stretched across North America, but it was believed to be extinct. That changed in 1944, when living Metasequoias were found in central China. This has been hailed as one of the most exciting plant discoveries of all time.

Tree 10: [Ginkgo](#) at 10th Street N.E. and East High Street

From Poplar Street, turn left onto Grove Street and return to East High Street. Turn right. Proceed to the traffic light at 10th Street N.E. and turn left. Then immediately turn left into the second driveway of a bank near the corner. (It may be best to do this on weekends or after business hours.)

From the bank's parking lot, you can view a spectacular Ginkgo Biloba in the backyard of a neighboring childcare center.

Like the Dawn Redwood, this species is a holdover from prehistoric times, having thrived continuously for some 200 million years. Although it is revered for its yellow-gold brilliance in the fall, the tree's fan-shaped leaves are beautiful in the summertime as well.

The Ginkgo is dioecious, meaning there are male and female trees. The seeds produced by the female are edible, but the putrid smell of their fleshy covering is highly disagreeable.

Tree 11: [Bur Oak-Post Oak Hybrid](#) in Maplewood Cemetery, Lexington Avenue at Maple Street

From the bank's parking lot, return to 10th Street Northeast, enter the left turn lane, and turn left onto East High Street. Proceed one block and turn right onto Lexington Avenue. To the left is Maplewood Cemetery, the city's oldest public burial ground.

The imposing tree at the center of the walled cemetery displays characteristics of two members of the White Oak group—the Bur Oak and the Post Oak. Oaks often intermix within their groups, but this cross is unusual. The Bur Oak and the Post Oak are both known for their distinctive leaves. They are round-lobed, waxy, and deep green in color.

To take a closer look at this tree on foot, enter the cemetery on Maple Street. Now part of the Martha Jefferson Historic District, Maplewood Cemetery was established in 1827, but it reflects the burial and landscaping practices of an earlier century. There are no formal streets or paths, and no formal plantings. Trees and shrubs appear randomly among the weathered headstones and monuments, as in an old country churchyard.

Trees 12 and 13: Bald Cypresses at 622 Farish Street

From Lexington Avenue, take a left on Taylor Street just past the cemetery. Taylor winds to the right into Kelly Avenue. Take the first left onto Farish Street. At the corner of Farish and 8th Street N.E., you will see a Bald Cypress, as well as another at the far side of the property.

We associate the Bald Cypress with swamplands, where its swollen lower trunk and “knees” rise up from standing water. However, this Virginia native grows splendidly in dry upland settings like this one.

Although it's a conifer, it's not an evergreen. Its short needles turn a rusty brown before falling in the winter, often causing people to fear that the tree has died. The needles will grow back to form a beautiful crown in the spring.

Tree 14: [Scarlet Oak](#) behind First Presbyterian Church 500 Park Street.

After turning into 8th Street from Farish, turn right into the parking lot for the First Presbyterian Church. At its north edge, a remarkably tall Scarlet Oak towers over the site. This species is one of the loveliest of the Red Oak group. It can be recognized by its leaves, with their deep, rounded “sinuses” between pointed lobes, as well as by its fiery show in the fall.

Old Scarlet Oaks are often swollen at the base, a non-fatal condition caused by the same fungus that wiped out the American Chestnut. This is one of several beautiful trees you will see on the church grounds, including a large Southern Magnolia and a Maple as you head to Park Street from the parking lot.

Trees 15 and 16: [Deodar Cedars](#) on Evergreen Avenue

From the church, turn right on to Park Street and take the third right onto Evergreen Avenue. On the right, at 638 Evergreen Ave, you will see the first of two outstanding Deodar Cedars on this street. This one was likely planted in 1930, when the house was built.

The other tree is past a sharp bend to the left at 673 Evergreen. You can't miss its three strong trunks, one of which reaches over the street to provide shade for passersby.

A native of the Himalayas, this graceful evergreen takes its name from the Sanskrit for "timber of the gods." It is beloved for its pendulous branches and has been a divine element of Western landscapes for some 200 years.

The Deodar is a true Cedar, unlike the Eastern Red Cedar so familiar in our area, which is actually a Juniper.

Tree 17: [Black Gum](#) at 535 Rio Rd

After rounding the bend on Evergreen Avenue, take a left on Lyons Court, then take a right onto Cargill Lane. When you reach Lyons Avenue, turn left. Then proceed to Park Street and turn right.

After dipping down and crossing Meadow Creek, Park Street becomes Rio Road. After a long curve, look for a sign that says "Watch for Turning Vehicles," and then take the next left at Rockbrook Drive. Be mindful of oncoming traffic as you make this sharp turn.

At the top of the hill on Rockbrook, there is a space where you can pull over and observe the unusual Black Gum in the yard across the street. Below the tree's wide and intricate crown, the trunk appears to be leaning at a perilous angle.

Also known as the Black Tupelo, this tree produces a spectacular display in the fall and is often the first to turn. In the spring, its tiny flowers are hard for us to see, but not for honeybees. Their nectar is the source of Tupelo Honey.

Before leaving, take a look at the Willow Oaks to the right on the property. Often grown in urban landscapes, this is the same type of tree that lines Charlottesville's Downtown Mall.

Tree 18: [Pecan](#) at 208 Wine Street

Return to Rio Road, turn right, and head back to Park Street and Downtown Charlottesville. Drive about a mile and a quarter. Just past Evergreen Avenue, which you were on earlier, turn right onto Wine Street.

The street takes its name from the old Monticello Wine Company, which once stood a few blocks away. From 1873 until Prohibition, it produced wines and brandy from native grapes and for a time was the largest winery in the South.

Drive carefully down this narrow two-way street. After passing Wine Cellar Circle on the right, you will see a huge, ancient Pecan tree beside the sidewalk on the left.

Photos from the 1890s show that this tree was here long before the house that it now shades. It was built in 1929 by the winery's general manager, Adolph Russow, for his daughter. He lived next door 212 Wine Street.

Typical of the species, the crown of this tree is enormous, arching over the house and across the roadway. Pecan trees are not native to Central Virginia, but they have become naturalized here. They are known to live for 300 years or more. This tree continues to produce nuts, although they are smaller than those from another Pecan that grows in the backyard.

Tree 19: Landmark [American Elm](#) at the Albemarle County Courthouse

From Wine Street, turn left onto Norwood Avenue. Just past a stop sign, turn left onto Parkway Street. After going through a small traffic circle, continue on Parkway to Park Street and turn right. After crossing East High Street, you will see the Albemarle County Courthouse on the right. Turn right, onto Jefferson Street to view the front of the courthouse, which was built in 1803.

The American Elm to the left of the portico was dedicated as a Landmark Tree on Arbor Day in 2015. It offers a fine example of the vase-shape crown associated with this species. It has been treated for Dutch elm disease. The smaller tree beside it is a Slippery Elm, which is less susceptible to the disease.

Street parking is available here, but spaces can be hard to find on weekdays. To view this tree on foot and to see others around historic Court Square, consider parking in the city parking garage a block away at 550 East Market Street.

Tree 20: Landmark [Shumard Oak](#), 201 E Market St

From Jefferson Street, take a quick left onto Fourth Street Northeast. Proceed one block to East Market Street and turn right. On the right, at East Market and Third Street Northeast, a Landmark Shumard Oak stands at the corner of the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library.

You can't miss this handsome tree, on one of the busiest corners downtown. On summer evenings, it occasionally shades musical performances under the library's classical portico. Banners announcing community events are often tied to its branches and strung across Market Street.

Formerly a federal courthouse and post office, this building became the library's central branch in 1981. When it was photographed in 1937, there were no trees on the site. This unusual Oak tree must have been planted soon thereafter. It was recognized as a Landmark Tree in 2017.

A member of the Red Oak group, the Shumard Oak is native to the Atlantic coastal plain and the Mississippi River Valley. It wins praise for its adaptability to varied landscapes, and with its upward branching pattern, it makes an ideal street tree.

Tree 21: [Basswood](#), or American Linden, in Market Street Park

Continue on Market Street and turn right on First Street North. At that corner of Market Street Park, across from the Hill and Wood Funeral Home, you will see an ancient Basswood Tree, or American Linden.

This is the last survivor among the park's original trees, planted in 1924. This tree, with its huge girth—more than 6 feet in diameter—shows just how big a Basswood can become over time. Although it suffers from a large interior cavity, its outer trunk remains sound and is still capable of holding up the tree's enormous weight. Its crown bounced back from being topped by a storm many years ago and continues to provide shade for park visitors.

The American Basswood is known for its broad, heart-shaped leaves. Wildlife feed on its seeds, twigs and buds, and bees use its flowers to make a honey that is highly prized. Its fine-grained wood is sought-after by woodcarvers and can be found in all sorts of products, including the bodies of electric guitars. Its inner bark is still used widely in basket weaving.

Tree 22: [White Ash](#) at the Albemarle-Charlottesville Historical Society

From First Street, take the next right at Jefferson Street. On the right in the next block, another one of Charlottesville's grand elder trees rises from the small Peace Park behind the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society.

This White Ash appears in photos from the early 20th century and was already towering over the site when this building opened its doors in 1921. The city's main library resided here before moving to the old post office building next door.

The White Ash has long shaded American yards, parks and streetscapes, but now it faces the threat of the Emerald Ash Borer, a rampant pest in this area. The tree's survival depends on expensive treatments. On older trees like this one, the bark forms distinct ridges and deep furrows in a diamond pattern.

The wood is known for its shock resistance and is used to make tool handles, hockey sticks, polo mallets and, of course, baseball bats like the famed Louisville Slugger. In folk medicine, the juice of Ash leaves provides a remedy for mosquito bites.

Tree 23: Landmark [Pin Oak](#) at the Albemarle County Office Building

From Jefferson, turn right onto Fourth Street Northeast and turn right again to return to Market Street. Continue to the intersection with McIntire Road and turn right. Find a parking space on the right, and walk across the street to the Albemarle County Office Building. Depending on the time of day, this can be one of the busiest streets in the city, so use caution.

As you approach the building's public entrance, the Landmark Pin Oak is to the left near the sidewalk. This spectacular tree is the fourth largest Pin Oak in Virginia. Its trunk measures more than 16 feet in circumference and more than five feet in diameter and soars up to a spectacular canopy. When it was recognized as a Landmark Tree on Arbor Day in 2016, it was being threatened by a sewer line project.

The Pin Oak is a member of the Red Oak group that is widely used as a landscape tree. It has deeply lobed leaves with bristles at the tips. Though it is a native of American lowlands, it thrives in upland settings, especially here in the Charlottesville area where it likes our acid soils. The tree's common name comes from its pin-like twigs.

Before leaving, enjoy the many other trees that shade the grounds of this building. It served as Charlottesville's Lane High School until 1974. A historic marker commemorates the Charlottesville Twelve, the brave Black children who were the first to integrate this school and Venable Elementary School in 1959.

Tree 24: Landmark [Southern Red Oak](#) at Venable School, 406 14th Street.

Return to the intersection of McIntire Road and Preston Avenue and turn right onto Preston. At the second stoplight, turn left onto Grady Avenue. At the next traffic light, turn left onto 14th Street. Proceed two blocks to Venable Elementary School, which is on the left.

The Landmark Southern Red Oak is to the right of the school and dominates the streetscape. With a trunk that is more than six and a half feet in diameter, this is the 10th largest Southern Red Oak in Virginia.

The school's students and faculty, as well as many people in the community, turned out to recognize this stately specimen as a Landmark Tree in 2018. The students also successfully nominated it for permanent protection under the city's Tree Ordinance.

Also known as the Spanish Oak, this tree grows as a native from the Piedmont to the Coast in Virginia, whereas the Northern Red Oak is native statewide. The Southern Red Oak tree can be distinguished from the Northern Red Oak by its smaller, more rounded acorns and by the shape of its leaves, which have a long central lobe and a tapered, bell-shaped base. Thus the saying: Southern Red Oaks have southern bells.

Thank you for taking our tour.

As you have seen on this drive, many of Charlottesville's neighborhoods are blessed with a lush tree canopy. However, our older and larger trees increasingly face the threat of intensive development, invasive pests, and extreme weather, including severe windstorms. The Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards hope you will join us in our work to protect all our area trees.