

Trees on the Quinnipiac River Gorge Trail

- 1. Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*)** - The maple syrup and sugar industry is an important part of many agricultural economies in the Northeast. The earliest written accounts of maple sugaring were made in the early 1600s by European explorers who observed Native Americans gathering maple sap. Sugar maple has long been valued as a hardwood timber species because of the wood's hardness and resistance to shock. Sugar maple is a popular decorative tree because of its tolerance to shade, spreading form, and brilliant autumn foliage.
- 2. Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)** - The female red cedar tree produces purple berry-like cones which are winter persistent. The cedar-waxwing is the chief user of these berry-like cones, but other mammals and birds enjoy them as well. Cedars also provide important nesting cover and protection. It is used for shelterbelts and wildlife plantings, and the wood is used for furniture, interior paneling, novelties, and bench posts. For many Native American tribes, the red cedar symbolizes the tree of life and is burned in sweat lodges and purification rights. Certain tribes consider it bad luck to cut one down because they hold the spirit of their ancestors.
- 3. Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)** - The tree grows in deep, rich, and moist soil, and commonly is found in bottomlands. It seeds once, it has orange/ yellow blossoms, and humming birds get nectar from these flowers. Bees make honey from the blossoms. Its seeds are used as winter food (winter persistent). Early settlers used the wood extensively in building, and made home remedies from the inner bark of the roots. It is used in the lumber industry, due to the wood being lightweight and easy to work with.
- 4. Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*)** - Connecticut's landscape is about 60 percent forested, and Eastern Hemlocks make up about 6 percent of that and is the most shade-tolerant tree in Connecticut and North America growing in 5% light. It is an evergreen tree with tiny cones. Hemlocks have shallow root systems that leave them susceptible to drought and wind fall. It is valued for its bark, an important source of tannin for leather industry. The wood has been used for roofing, boxes, and crates. Native Americans and white settlers also made tea from hemlock leaves, which have high vitamin C content.
- 5. Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)** - The Sycamore is one of the largest hardwood trees as well as Connecticut's largest tree. The Gifford Pinchot Sycamore, Connecticut's largest tree, stands in honor of one of America's leading advocates for environmental conservation. The tree was last measured in 1998 with a circumference of 26 feet, and a height of 95 feet and a canopy of 140 feet (the length of half a football field.) Native Americans would often use the entire trunk of a Sycamore tree to create massive canoes. The tree is commonly used to create flooring, barrels, and cabinets. In the Bible, the Sycamore is considered a symbol of strength, divinity, and eternity. In American history, a 168-year-old Sycamore tree is credited with sheltering large groups of soldiers during the Battle of Brandywine in Pennsylvania. Wood ducks and owls are known to build nests in the old tree trunks and some species of bats use sycamores as nursery trees.
- 6. Yellow Birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*)** These trees have straight trunks and mature bark is smooth and shiny, usually separating into thin layers, giving the tree a shaggy appearance. The wood of yellow birch is strong and shows a wide color variation, from reddish brown to creamy white. It is used for furniture, cabinetry, interior doors, and more. The seeds are eaten by various songbird species. Red squirrel cut and store mature catkins and eat the seeds while beaver and porcupine chew the bark.

7. **White Pine (*Pinus strobus*)** – The white pine is an evergreen that has green needles, which means the needles are less than three years old, and orange needles, which mean they are three years old. The tree sheds needles every three years. It is called the Tree of Great Peace by the Haudenosaunee Native Americans. There was a time in colonial history, when the White Pine was reserved for the British Royal Navy and the king marked the trees by blazing a broad arrow on the trunk declaring them to be the 'Kingstrees'! The masts that adorn the US Constitution were actually designed from single trees and laminated to withstand cannon ball impacts. All through the American Revolution, a favorite pastime of the patriots was to see how many 'Kingstrees' a single man could ax and haul. The wood of the White Pine is known to aid the designing of superior quality paneling, furniture and flooring. They are also used in paintings and planted for Christmas trees. The seeds are consumed by various mammals and birds.
8. **White Oak – (*Quercus alba*)** – Connecticut's state tree, The White Oak, decorates the opposite side of the Connecticut state quarter. The Charter Oak of Hartford, Connecticut, is one of the most famous white oaks in America. On October 9, 1662, The General Court of Connecticut formally received the Charter won from King Charles II by Governor John Winthrop, Jr., who had crossed the ocean for the purpose. Twenty-five years later, with the succession of James II to the throne, Connecticut's troubles began. Sir Edmund Andros, His Majesty's agent, followed up failure of various strategies by arriving in Hartford with an armed force to seize the Charter. After hours of debate, with the Charter on the table between the opposing parties, the candle-lit room suddenly went dark. Moments later when the candles were re-lighted, the Charter was gone. Captain Joseph Wadsworth is credited with having removed and concealed the Charter in the majestic White Oak on the Wyllys estate. The tree's acorns were used for food by Native Americans. The White Oak produces acorns, which start germinating within days, are a favorite of deer and turkey because they are less bitter. White oak is used in construction, shipbuilding and some Japanese martial arts weapons.
9. **Musclewood (*Carpinus caroliniana*)** - The seeds of Musclewood are eaten by the Wood Duck, Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite, Yellow-Rumped Warbler, and other birds. The Chippewa Native Americans used the wood as the main supporting posts for the ridge pole of the wigwam or tent. Because it is exceptionally strong and hard, the wood has been made into golf clubs, handles, wedges and tool handles.
10. **White Ash – (*Fraxinus americana*)** White Ash seeds are eaten by many birds and small mammals. This tree is most famous for being the best wood for baseball bats and other sports equipment. The reasons for white ash being the most popular wood for these items are its toughness and durability under large amounts of strain. Native Americans appreciated its usefulness for tools and implements. The emerald ash borer is a small, non-native beetle from Asia is attacking White Ash. Scientists are studying its effects.
11. **Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)** – Sassafras is an orange-red berry producer, which is fall migration food for migratory birds. Sassafras is well known for its fragrant properties. The leaves and bark both have a slight citrus scent, while the roots have a strong root-beer aroma, from which root beer was historically produced by early colonists. The crushed leaves were used by colonists to thicken soups and stews. Sassafras wood is very durable and is used to make buckets, barrels, poles, and posts. The sassafras is sometimes grown to restore depleted soils. The trees regenerate quickly after a disturbance and are early pioneers in old fields.
12. **Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)** – The Black Cherry is a fall berry producer; the berries, an important food source, are used during migration by migratory birds. It is one of the most valued cabinet and furniture woods in North America. It is also used for paneling, interior trim, handles, crafts, toys, and scientific instruments.

13. **American Elm (*Ulmus American*)** – The American Elm is a spring seed producer located near rivers and flood plains. The seeds, buds, and tender young twigs are used for food by birds and mammals. The wood is used in fine furniture, boxes, barrels, and crates, as well as firewood. New Haven, known as the “Elm City” had many elms growing along its streets. In the 1930’s, a disease called “Dutch Elm Disease” devastated many trees, killing individual branches and eventually the entire tree. Today, some trees still survive.
14. **Black Birch – (*Betula lenta*)** Birch sap was rarely made into syrup but rather fermented into birch beer made by mixing a decoction of birch leaves with honey. The oil was used as flavoring in chewing gum and candies. Birch trees were tapped for their sap by Native Americans of the New World and Europeans of the Old, where the birch was considered sacred; trees were planted on graves so that the souls of the deceased could climb toward heaven. The tiny seeds can be blown long distances across snow and are eaten by small birds.
15. **Spicebush – (*Lindera benzoin*)** Spicebush is a shrub that produces red seeds that are eaten in the fall by migratory songbirds such as wood thrushes and scarlet tanagers. Its bark and leaves have a citrus-like odor when crushed. The Spicebush Swallow-tail butterfly lays its eggs on this plant.
16. **Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)** It is easily recognized in the fall when the red leaves stand out along the forest edges along roads and riverbanks. It is an extremely rapid-growing tree, furnishing a fairly strong, close-grained wood, and is used broadly for inexpensive furniture and fuel wood. Pioneers used the tannin extracted from the tree to make dyes and ink. The dyes were used for linens, hats, and shoes. The fruit, a samara, is an important wildlife food because it develops in the spring when other foods typically are not yet available.
17. **Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)** - Northern red oak is an important source of hardwood lumber because the wood is close-grained, heavy, and hard; it machines well and accepts a variety of finishes. It is used for furniture, veneer, interior finishing, cabinets, paneling, and flooring as well as for agricultural implements, posts, and railway ties. The acorns of red oak (and other oak species) were an important food source for Native Americans and local wildlife.
18. **American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*)** – The American Beech is easily recognized, sadly, for its very smooth, gray bark that usually has someone's initials carved into it. The wood is strong and resistant to splitting and used to make tool handles, baskets, and novelty items. The leaves and bark of the tree provide extracts for the making of fabric dyes. Early American colonists even used the leaves to stuff mattresses. Beech nuts, which have high oil content, are a valuable source of nutrition for numerous types of wildlife.