

Plant Identification Resources for Master Gardeners

Plant identification is a common home gardener question that comes to Master Gardeners. The Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinic (PIDC) does not provide plant identification services.

When you need a plant identified, follow these steps to get an answer:

STEP 1. Start by getting good photos of the plant. Capture good photos before the quality of the sample deteriorates. Guidelines for how to take good photos can be found here:

<https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/pidc/digital-photography>

Some General Tips for Taking Photos:

- *Take pictures of things both close up and far away. Photos of the entire plant showing overall habit and the location in which it's growing are just as helpful as close-ups of leaves or flowers.*
- *Focus on unique features – flowers, fruit, bark, leaves, etc.*
- *Make sure they are in focus!*

STEP 2. Use a plant identification app to help. Information on how to use these convenient digital resources can be found here: <https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/2022/04/plant-identification-apps-gardeners>

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STEP 3. Utilize books and online resources. Several suggested resources are on the next page.

STEP 4. Consult with a local resource in your county Extension office or related local professionals (such as DNR personnel). Not every office has resources like this but utilize them if you do!

STEP 5. If all these resources don't provide an answer, then **talk to County Extension Office.** They have even more resources available to them to help!

RECOMMENDED PLANT IDENTIFICATION RESOURCES

Websites

- [Native Plant Trust Go Botany Interactive Key](https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/full/) - <https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/full/>
- [Minnesota Wildflowers Key](https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/page/search) - <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/page/search>
- [Weed Identification Fact Sheets from Iowa State University](https://crops.extension.iastate.edu/encyclopedia/weed-identification-fact-sheets) - <https://crops.extension.iastate.edu/encyclopedia/weed-identification-fact-sheets> (Many plant IDs are for weeds)
- [Interactive Weed Identification Key from Virginia Tech](https://weedid.cals.vt.edu/) - <https://weedid.cals.vt.edu/>

If you have a short-list of plants from the plant ID apps, you can look up by scientific name. These sites have great pictures and info to narrow it down to one.

- [Minnesota Wildflowers](https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/) - <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/>
- [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](https://www.wildflower.org/plants/) - <https://www.wildflower.org/plants/>
- [USDA Plants Database](https://plants.usda.gov/home) - <https://plants.usda.gov/home>
- [Gymnosperm Database \(conifers\)](https://www.conifers.org/) - <https://www.conifers.org/>

Books

- This list from the [US Forest Service](https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/features/books/midwestbooks.shtml) provides great book recommendations for your office - <https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/features/books/midwestbooks.shtml>
- Other Books to Consider:
 - [National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Wildflowers-Eastern Region](#)
 - [A Peterson Field Guide To Trees And Shrubs: Northeastern and north-central United States and southeastern and south-central Canada](#)
 - [National Geographic Pocket Guide to Trees and Shrubs of North America](#)
 - [National Geographic Pocket Guide to Wildflowers of North America](#)
 - [Manual of Grasses for North America](#)

Apps

- PlantNet
- LeafSnap
- Plantsnap
- Seek
- iPlant
- PictureThis
- Google Lens
- and many others