



Custer State Park The Need for Trees

Everything needs trees; people, animals, insects, fungus... even other trees. Because trees provide so many things for people and for the forest, including shelter, habitat, food and oxygen, we all have a need for trees. This TRACK Trail Adventure will help you identify six of the most common trees found in Custer State Park.



Use the pictures and text in this brochure to identify and learn about trees. Just remember, for your safety, stay on the trail and be aware of your surroundings.



Register Your Hike... Get a Prize!

Thank you for joining us on the trail today. We want you to join the Trail TRACKer™ Team. It's fun, healthy and free. Best of all, you can earn prizes by walking TRACK Trails™ and TRACKing them on our website. For more information about the Trail TRACKer Team, other TRACK Trail™ adventures near you, or for general information about the Kids in Parks™ program, please visit our website at:

www.kidsinparks.com

Your Opinion Matters!

We would like to hear about your adventure on the trail today. Your feedback will help us improve the TRACK Trail program and will help us build more and better TRACK Trail Adventures in the future. Please visit our website (www.kidsinparks.com) and give us your opinion about the quality of your experience.

Kids in Parks...

for the Health of our Kids and our Communities.

Custer State Park's TRACK Trail Partners

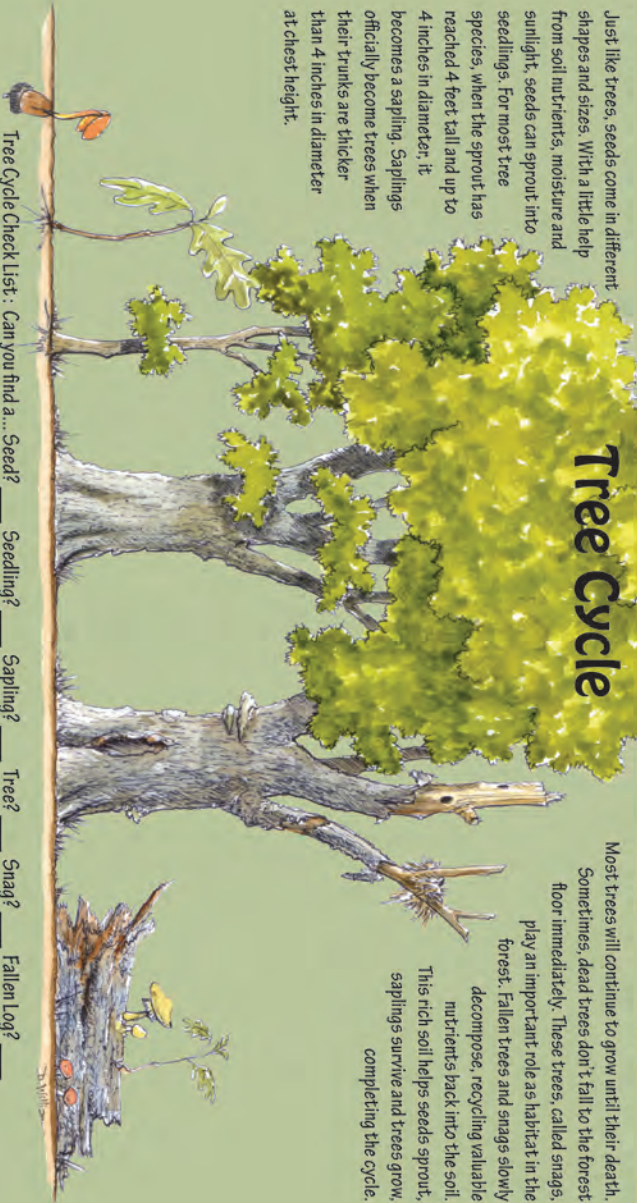


Kids in Parks Founding Partners



Tree Cycle

Just like trees, seeds come in different shapes and sizes. With a little help from soil nutrients, moisture and sunlight, seeds can sprout into seedlings. For most tree species, when the sprout has reached 4 feet tall and up to 4 inches in diameter, it becomes a sapling. Saplings officially become trees when their trunks are thicker than 4 inches in diameter at chest height.



Most trees will continue to grow until their death. Sometimes, dead trees don't fall to the forest floor immediately. These trees, called snags, play an important role as habitat in the forest. Fallen trees and snags slowly decompose, recycling valuable nutrients back into the soil. This rich soil helps seeds sprout, saplings survive and trees grow, completing the cycle.

Tree Cycle Check List: Can you find a... Seed? _____ Seedling? _____ Sapling? _____ Tree? _____ Snag? _____ Fallen Log? _____

Paper Birch



If you see a tree along the trail with whitish-tan, peeling bark, you are looking at a paper birch (please do not peel the bark off of live paper birch trees). Paper birches have multiple trunks with drooping branches and shiny green leaves that turn a beautiful yellow in the fall. Ice cream sticks, toothpicks and toys are often made using paper birch. Native Americans used the bark as an outer covering on canoes.

Bur Oak



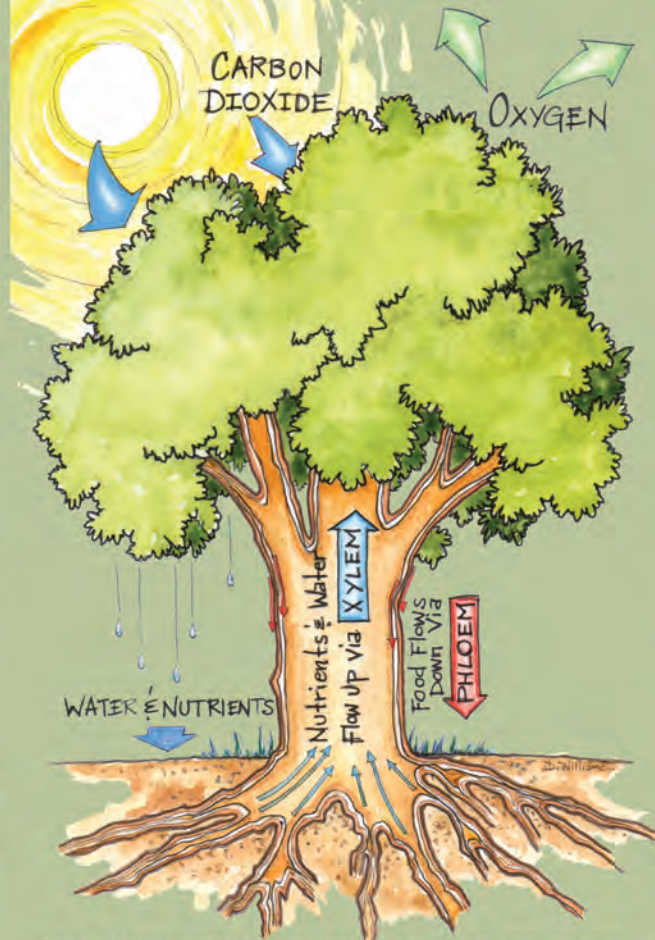
The bur oak is the only native oak species in Custer State Park and the Black Hills region. The thick, furrowed bark makes this tree fire-resistant, protecting the cambium layer that nourishes the tree. It is called "bur" oak because it has bristly, husky acorns, which are an important food source for turkeys, deer and squirrels. Bur oak is used for furniture, houses, railroad ties and many other wood products.

Plains Cottonwood



Plains cottonwood has gray bark with deep furrows and tall ridges. The leaves are light green and shiny on top, and make a noise similar to the "trembling" of aspen leaves when blown in the wind. Native Americans fed the twigs to their horses and made a yellow dye for feathers by boiling the buds. The cottonwood gets its name from the fluffy, cotton-like seeds that are released in the summer.

The Need to Know How Trees Grow



Plants and trees have the ability to make their own food in a process known as photosynthesis. They do this by sucking water and nutrients from the soil up through their xylem and into their leaves. The water and nutrients are combined with carbon dioxide and sunlight to make a sugary food called glucose. This food is then distributed by way of its phloem to the rest of the tree, so it can grow.

Illustrations drawn by David Williams

Green Ash



A medium-sized tree with compound leaves, the green ash grows well in many areas of Custer State Park and the Black Hills. The winged seeds last through the winter and attract birds, deer and rabbits. Native Americans used green ash wood to make bows, arrows, tipi pegs, drums and meat drying racks. If you have a wooden tennis racket or baseball bat, it might be made from green ash.

Ponderosa Pine



The most abundant and widespread tree in the Black Hills, the ponderosa pine is an evergreen that has needles in groups of two and three. Ponderosa pines provide important habitat for Black Hills wildlife. Porcupines feed on the tender bark and mule deer browse the needles. The seeds are eaten by turkeys, nuthatches, crossbills, grosbeaks, pine siskins, grouse, squirrels, chipmunks and mice.

Willow



Look for willow shrubs along the banks of Grace Coolidge Creek. There are 13 species of willow in the Black Hills. Willows keep soil from eroding along streams and provide shelter and food for birds and other animals. Beavers use willow when making dams and love to eat the bark. The bark of willow contains a chemical similar to aspirin and was used by many Native American tribes in tea.