

Guide to Tree and Shrub Identification: Part VII

Resuming our tree and shrub identification, after the last category of simple alternate lobed leaves, I have one species that is considered simple, alternate, crenate (rounded teeth). The shrub possumhaw has this leaf type, with 1 to 2 inch leaves that are oblong with the base narrower than the tip, the latter of which may be notched. Possumhaws are dioecious (male and female flowers on different plants), and the female plants produce red berries that usually survive throughout the winter. Its evergreen cousin, yaupon holly, has smaller leaves and is more common in the wild east of the Hill Country.

This completes our list of simple leaves with an alternate arrangement along the stem. The next category is one with simple leaves, oppositely arranged, as shown with the pairs of leaves in the photo.

An elbow-bush is a rounded shrub with one-half to two inch oval leaves that usually have a fine-toothed margin. Elbow-bush is also called Spring-herald because it blooms the last of January and is the first species in our area to do so. It generally shows an opposite pattern to the small branches. It is also dioecious and female plants produce blue-black berries.

Mexican silktassel is a medium to large shrub that has one to three inch oval leaves that have a leathery, thick texture and are hairy below. The leaves have an entire margin and a wavy shape instead of being flat. This multi-trunk shrub is evergreen.

Ligustrum or Japanese privet, is an invasive, non-native shrub to small tree. The leaves are two to five inches long, oval with a somewhat sharp tip, shiny and dark green. The margins are strikingly entire and uniform, almost giving the leaves the appearance of a plastic plant. Ligustrum is evergreen and produces poisonous black berries. It can form thickets and often escapes cultivation and becomes a serious problem to control.

Coral honeysuckle is a vine but was not included in the vine category discussed earlier because it is less commonly encountered, except for where it has been planted. It is an evergreen twining vine with one to three inch long oval leaves which are about one inch wide with entire margins. It produces bright red or orange tubular flowers in good rain years from early spring to late fall that are much visited by hummingbirds.

Rough-leaf dogwood can be a small tree or large shrub. It has one to four inch oval leaves that are pointed at the tip with an entire margin. They are rough on the upper surface and the veins are parallel and prominent on top and raised on the bottom. These dogwoods produce cream-colored clusters of flowers in April and May which make waxy white berries in the fall. Rough-leaf dogwoods root-sprout rather prolifically

and can form dense thickets which are good wildlife cover, but can be a nuisance in your yard.

Other simple, opposite, entire species include white-bush honeysuckle, invasive Japanese honeysuckle (non-native), beebrush, flame acanthus and canyon mock-orange.

Less common simple opposite toothed shrubs are American beautyberry and rusty blackhaw viburnum.

American beautyberry is a three to eight foot tall multi-trunk shrub with oblong, pointed, toothed leaves. The leaves are usually three to seven inches long. Beautyberries are distinctive in the way they flower and produce berries in tight clusters at the nodes of the stems forming striking bunches of purple berries up and down the stems. The birds seldom allow them to last into the winter.

Rusty blackhaw viburnum is a large shrub or small to medium-sized tree. It has one to three inch glossy leaves with toothed margins. The center vein usually has red hairs along the underside of the leaf. It produces clusters of white blooms in early spring and dark blue berries.

The bigtooth maple, the famous fall-color tree of Lost Maples State Natural Area, is a large tree with simple, opposite, lobed leaves. The leaves are about two to three inches long and wide with three main lobes and several smaller ones, but no teeth. While it grows natively today only in isolated areas like the Lost Maples SNA, Big Bend National Park, and Guadalupe National Park, it is commonly planted and does well in many areas.

This concludes all of the simple leaf species in my list. Next week we will begin the compound leaf species.

Until next time...

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