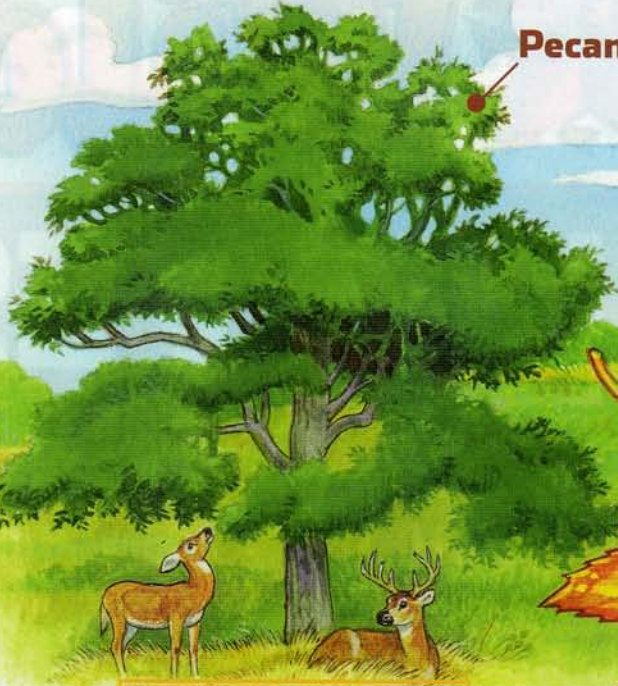


# » The Life of a Leaf



Sycamore



Pecan tree



Sweetgum



Red oak

Cricket



Cedar elm



Cottonwood



Fall webworm

Pecan



Grasshopper

Aphid

Dogwood

## DECIDUOUS PLANTS

DECIDUOUS (dee-SID-you-us) plants such as this pecan tree lose their leaves in the winter because the sun does not shine as much. Plants don't waste energy taking care of leaves they won't be using, so they shed them. Don't worry! New leaves sprout in the spring when the sun shines more and plants use them again to do photosynthesis.



The pecan tree is a special symbol because it's the official tree of Texas!

## PHOTOSYNTHESIS

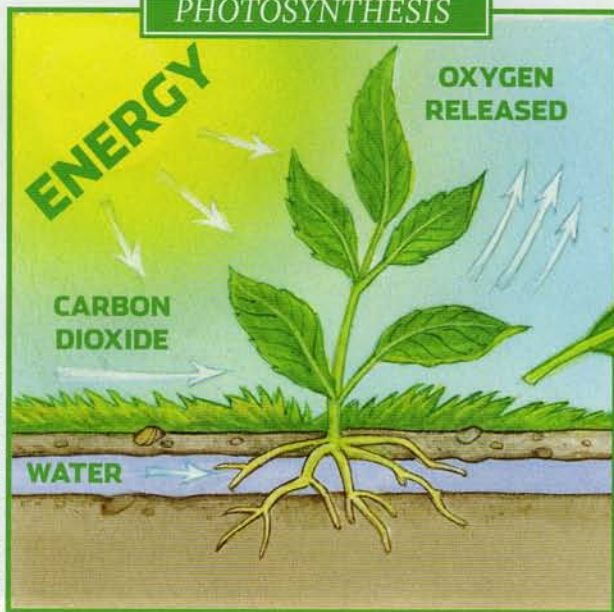


ILLUSTRATION © ALTON LANGFORD

**Big-toothed maple**



**Black webspinner fly**



**Loblolly pine**



**Evergreen bagworm**



**LEAF COLORS**

LEAF COLORS come from "pigments." The green color in leaves comes from the pigment chlorophyll. Other pigments make leaves orange, yellow, red and purplish.

Leaves always have orange and yellow pigments in them, but we can't see these colors until the fall, when leaves stop making green chlorophyll. Leaves can also turn other colors once nights cool down and they start making other pigments.

**WHY LEAVES CHANGE COLOR**

AS WE GET CLOSER to winter, days get shorter and nights get longer. When this happens, leaves get the message to stop making chlorophyll. Why? Because when winter comes they will not have as much sunshine for photosynthesis and will not need chlorophyll. Without chlorophyll, leaves are not green.

Want to see some spectacular leaf colors? Check out Lost Maples State Natural Area in autumn!

**Sawfly**

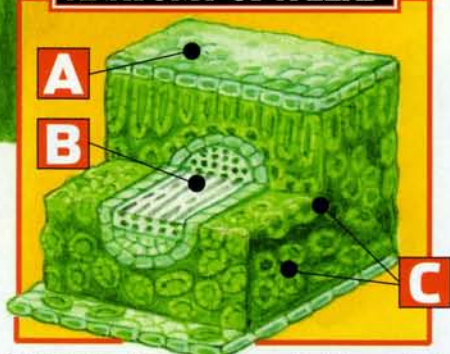


**Mesquite**

**Post oak**

**American elm**

**ANATOMY OF A LEAF**



- A** EPIDERMIS - This see-through skin protects the leaf on top and on bottom and helps it breathe.
- B** VEINS - Veins carry water and the food the leaf makes (called "glucose") to other parts of the plant.
- C** MESOPHYLL - This is where green chlorophyll changes sunlight into food for the plant.

**EVERGREEN PLANTS**

EVERGREENS like this loblolly pine do not lose their leaves in the winter because a waxy coating protects them. They also have a special liquid inside that helps keep their leaves from freezing. That means the tree does not have to use a lot of food to take care of these leaves.

Did you know that what we call a "pine needle" is really a leaf? And all those brown pine needles under evergreens didn't fall off because of winter. They fell off so new, healthier leaves could take their place.



**Walking stick**



**LEAVES WORK TO...**

**PROVIDE OXYGEN**

Leaves give off oxygen. That gives us and other living things oxygen to inhale. This is why we call forests "the lungs of the earth."

**CLEAN THE AIR**

Leaves absorb carbon dioxide, which is what people, animals and cars exhale. It's bad to have too much carbon dioxide in the air. Plants get rid of some of it for us.

**MAKE NEW SOIL**

When leaves fall, they decompose into tiny pieces. These pieces add stuff to the dirt that makes plants grow better.

**PROVIDE FOOD**

Many animals and insects eat leaves. See how many Texas insects you can find on these pages.



## >> WILD ART

### RUB A LEAFY LIKENESS!

- 1) Go for a walk and collect at least four different kinds of leaves. Find the freshest ones you can so they don't crumble when you rub crayons over them.
- 2) Put your leaves face down on a piece of cardboard or paper.
- 3) Put a piece of paper on top of them.
- 4) Rub over the area where the leaves lie with different colors of crayons.
- 5) Watch as imprints of your leaves appear on your paper! How are they the same? How are they different? Do you see the veins?



## >> WILD MATH

IF THE VEINS from one elm leaf were put end to end, they would measure 700 feet long!

Round this number to the nearest thousandth:

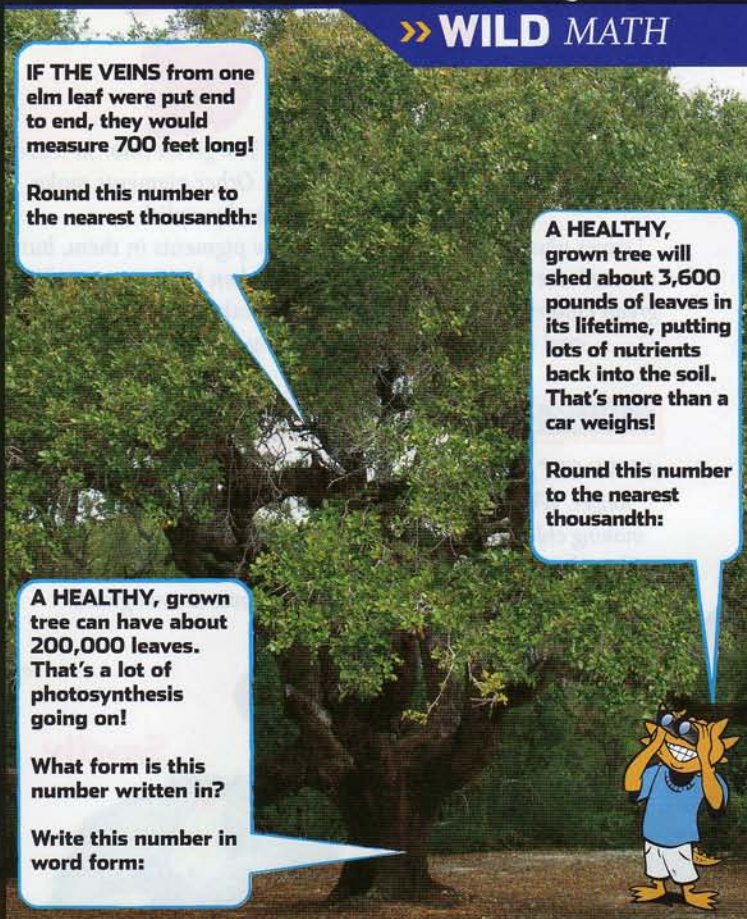
A HEALTHY, grown tree will shed about 3,600 pounds of leaves in its lifetime, putting lots of nutrients back into the soil. That's more than a car weighs!

Round this number to the nearest thousandth:

A HEALTHY, grown tree can have about 200,000 leaves. That's a lot of photosynthesis going on!

What form is this number written in?

Write this number in word form:



## >> KEEPING IT WILD

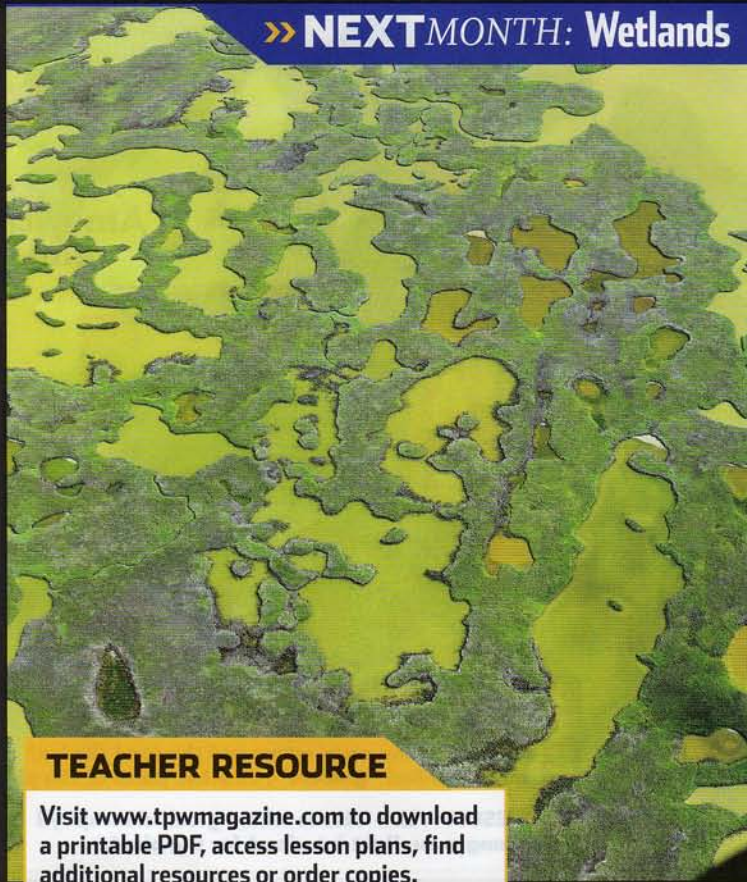
### DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN MAKE DIRT OUT OF LEAVES?!

WHEN LEAVES and other stuff from plants decompose, they fall apart into teeny-tiny pieces. It takes a long time, but eventually they'll turn into soil.

You can help them do this a lot faster by creating a "compost pile." Instead of throwing the leaves from your yard into the trash, start a compost pile and put them there. Add other plant materials like rotten fruit, vegetables and coffee grounds from your kitchen. Keep adding things and mixing up your pile (that's important!). Start now and you just might have some dynamite dirt in time for your spring garden!



## >> NEXTMONTH: Wetlands



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