



Summer 7-8-2005

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Recommended Citation

University Communications, Illinois Wesleyan University, "Online Tree Map Showcases Illinois Wesleyan's Campus Trees" (2005). *News and Events*. 646.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/646>

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Online Tree Map Showcases Illinois Wesleyan's Campus Trees

July 8, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.- An interactive tree map now on the Illinois Wesleyan University Web site aims to provide a virtual field trip while answering questions frequently asked of University grounds keepers regarding the nearly 100 different species of trees on campus.

“People are always asking us, what (trees) do we have, where are they,” says Art Killian, a 22-year veteran of the IWU grounds crew who spearheaded the map project. “Grade school students come in, and they want to identify the trees by the leaves. We get people saying, 'Oh, this is a gorgeous tree, what is it?' I tried to design the pages so it was like a field trip. I tried to make it fun.”

Illinois Wesleyan's 79-acre campus is home to more than 1,000 trees. Not all are shown on the map, but a sample from each species is identified with a graphic that visitors can click to access more information about that type of tree, and get a closer look at its leaves and seed pods. A version of the map can be printed from the Web page for those who want to visit the campus arboretum in person, and work is under way to place markers on or near the trees that are identified on the map. Killian plans to continue expanding the site with updates and informative links.

Visiting gardeners or biology buffs will see a wider variety of trees on the campus than are typically sold at nurseries, where the stock is often limited to “the most foolproof or most colorful” species, Killian says. Yet he has found the unusual can offer hidden treasures.

“We try to bring in quite a few interesting things that are compatible with this area.

“We have trees on this campus that I'm sure people have never heard of before, like a cork tree. Or they think of magnolias being these little pink flowery things that come out in the spring, but we have these bizarre trees that are called cucumber magnolia trees that are huge, and don't get anything like what you'd expect when you think of magnolia. A lot of people have called the pink magnolia trees 'tulip trees,' but there's actually a real tulip tree (on campus). The flower you never see - it's tucked up in the leaves - but if you find it, it's this gorgeous green flower that looks just like a tulip, green and orange, that just hides in the foliage. Those kinds of trees are really nice.”

A Kentucky coffee tree also produces greenish flowers that are concealed in the upper foliage, which can make the entire campus smell of citrus when in bloom - with most people unable to determine the aroma's source.

Killian adds, “You think of a pine as a Christmas tree-looking thing, but if you look at a pine as it ages, it gets really open and twisted and the branches are separate from each other -they're gorgeous trees but you have to re-train yourself to think like that, instead of that they all should be these perfect little sheared things.”

Appearances aside, planting a variety of species also provides some practical protection from disease or pest outbreaks.

The tree map is located at www.iwu.edu/treemap.