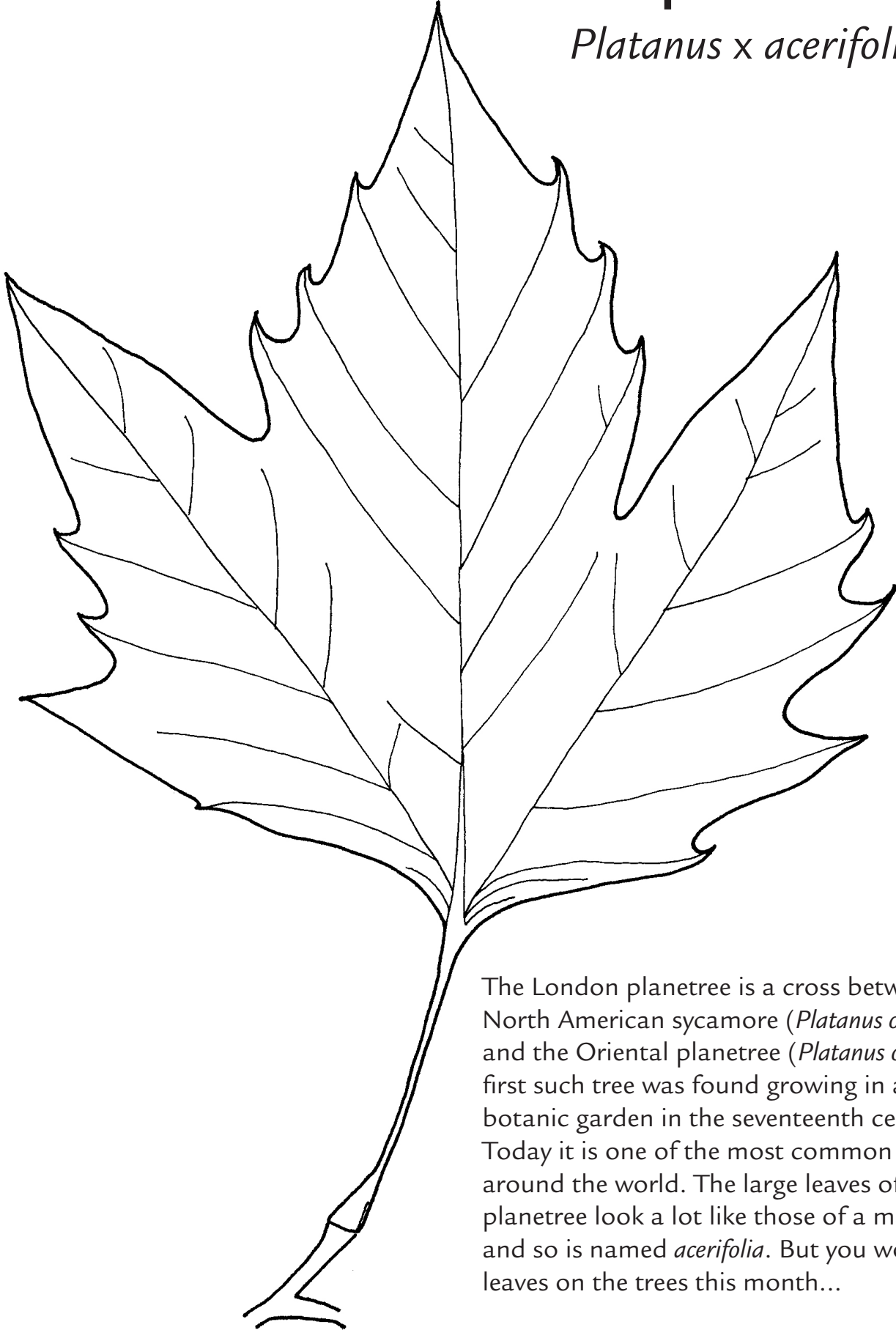


London planetree

Platanus x acerifolia

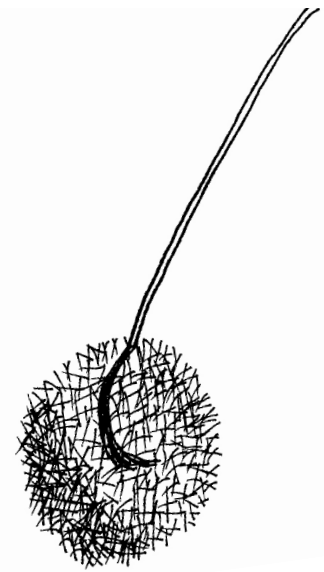


The London planetree is a cross between the North American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) and the Oriental planetree (*Platanus orientalis*). The first such tree was found growing in a London botanic garden in the seventeenth century. Today it is one of the most common street trees around the world. The large leaves of the London planetree look a lot like those of a maple (*Acer*) and so is named *acerifolia*. But you won't find any leaves on the trees this month...

Winter is a great time to look at the **exfoliating bark** of the planetree. As the patches of bark peel off, a multitude of colors (green, olive, yellow, cream, lavender, gray, tan, and brown) is revealed. The camouflage pattern makes this tree easy to recognize although there are a few other trees with similar bark—can you think of any?

There are several theories about why some planetrees shed their bark:

1. The thin bark allows for increased water movement which likely speeds growth and leads to exfoliation.
2. Shedding may prevent fungi, parasites and epiphytes from growing on the tree trunk.
3. Shedding exposes inner bark that may allow young trees to photosynthesize even when there are no leaves on them.



The ball-like fruit of the planetree is a cluster of tightly packed seed capsules. There are often two fruits per stem. The seeds are a good source of food for birds in winter.

Letterboxing!

Letterboxing is a fun way to explore the Arboretum and find planetrees and sycamores. For more information on letterboxing, go to www.letterboxing.org. Check out a new letterbox every month—stop by the Hunnewell Visitor Center or download a guide online.

To find the letterbox, follow these directions:

- Go to the intersection of Bussey Hill Road and Valley Road. Go to the map table on the northeast side of the road. Check out the plant label at the top right corner. It is for a nearby London planetree (*Platanus x acerifolia*) which was actually planted at the Arboretum in 1891.
- Look up and toward the right, between a broadleaved evergreen and red fruited viburnum. Take 34 steps to the London planetree, accession #16595-B.
- Now turn left. In front of you is the evergreen viburnum and behind it is the tall trunk of Oriental planetree (*P. orientalis*). Take 63 steps (go around the viburnum) to the tree.
- Turn left again and take 16 steps to the sycamore (*P. occidentalis*).
- Look across the paved road. Can you spot the *Platanus x acerifolia* ‘Suttneri’ with its creamy white bark? Take 56 steps to get there.
- The letterbox is hidden behind this tree. Follow the directions inside and leave everything just as you found it.



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