



Summary Article: **beech**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

Image from: [Beech trees flourish on chalky high ground. The... in Philip's Encyclopedia](#)

common name for the Fagaceae, a family of trees and shrubs mainly of temperate and subtropical regions in the Northern Hemisphere. The principal genera—*Castanea* (chestnut and chinquapin), *Fagus* (beech), and *Quercus* (oak, including the cork oak)—form a dominant part of temperate woodland vegetation and are highly valued throughout the world for hardwood timber. Some of their species are also cultivated for their edible fruits and as ornamental and shade trees. The beeches have distinctive smooth, silvery gray bark and pale green leaves that turn golden in autumn and are often winter-persistent. The tough, strong, easily worked wood is used for furniture, flooring, crating, and woodenware. Beechnuts have a sweet flavor but are now seldom eaten except locally in poorer areas of Europe. The American beech (*F. grandifolia*) grows in rich soil over much of the NE United States and Canada. A slow-growing tree, it is declining in abundance through lumbering and through beech bark disease, a fungal infection that attacks the tree through holes bored in its bark by a scale insect. The blue, or water, beech is an American hornbeam of the birch family. The European beech (*F. sylvatica*) is an important forest tree, especially in S and Central Europe, and is valued for its wood and for an oil extracted from the nuts. Several of its varieties have reddish brown or purplish leaves and are cultivated in America as ornamentals, e.g., the purple and copper beeches. The southern beeches belong to the small genus *Nothofagus*; in the Southern Hemisphere, the importance of their timber is second only to that of the eucalypts. The beech family is classified in the division Magnoliophyta, class Magnoliopsida, order Fagales.

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Beech. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/beech>



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