

# Aspen Trees

Aspens are very unusual trees. Their most amazing trait can't be seen because it's underground. Aspens are the most widespread tree in America and Canada.

Most trees need to spread seeds. The seeds fly on the wind or are carried by animals. They land in a different area. That's how new trees get started. Although aspens have seeds, most baby aspens start out in a different way.

Aspens can reproduce through their roots, which grow shoots underground. The shoots grow up through the soil and become new aspen trees. So, in a forest of aspens, all the trees are connected underground. This is called a root system. The group of connected aspens is called a colony. Aspen colonies are the largest living organisms in the world.

Aspen colonies can live for thousands of years. Each tree dies after about 150 years. New trees keep sprouting from the root system. In the fall, aspen leaves turn a brilliant gold color. Each winter, the leaves fall, which means they are deciduous trees.

Aspen bark can photosynthesize. Photosynthesis is the act of transforming sunshine into energy in plants. Most trees use their green leaves filled with the chemical chlorophyll in this process. Because aspens also use their bark, they can continue growing even in the winter after their leaves have fallen off. In many aspens, you can see a green tint on their bark that allows photosynthesis to continue.

You can recognize aspens by their tall, slender shape. Their bark is smooth, with a gray or white color. Their leaves are round and thick, with a point at the top. Aspen colonies usually grow in places where the other trees are conifers, or pine trees. Because the aspens are taller than the pines, they get more access to sunshine. Too much shade will kill aspens.

You can also hear aspens when you're near them. Because their leaves are so thick and high up, they make a rattling sound when the wind blows through them. This sound is often called "quaking."

Many animals depend on aspens for shelter or food. Butterflies often lay eggs in their bark. Hares eat the leaves, while moose and elk tear off the bark with their teeth.