

Tree family names

Botanical reference for Module 2: Observing trees

This reference links selected trees to their accepted plant families. Scientific names and family placement were checked against Plants of the World Online, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in July 2026.

Important: Family characteristics are clues, not proof of identification. Students must compare several features, such as leaves, bark, flowers and fruit, and record uncertainty as Unknown, Possible or Likely.

Family	Accepted plant name(s)	Useful family clues	Taxonomic note
Arecaceae	<i>Phoenix dactylifera</i> L.	Palm family. Palms have parallel-veined leaves and usually an unbranched trunk. Their fruits are often drupes or berries.	Accepted name. Date palm is native mainly from the Arabian Peninsula to southern Pakistan, not West Africa.
Rutaceae	<i>Citrus × limon</i> (L.) Osbeck <i>Citrus × aurantiifolia</i> (Christm.) Swingle <i>Citrus × paradisi</i> Macfad.	Citrus or rue family. Leaves commonly contain aromatic oil glands. Citrus fruits have a leathery peel and juice-filled segments.	All three are cultivated hybrids. The multiplication sign (×) is part of the scientific name.
Anacardiaceae	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Cashew or mango family. Members often contain resin canals and commonly produce a one-seeded drupe.	Accepted name.
Caricaceae	<i>Carica papaya</i> L.	Papaya family. Members usually contain milky latex. Papaya is a large, soft-stemmed herb with a tree-like form.	Accepted name. Papaya is not a woody tree in the strict botanical sense.
Myrtaceae	<i>Psidium guajava</i> L. <i>Syzygium guineense</i> (Willd.) DC.	Myrtle family. Leaves often have visible oil glands. Flowers commonly have many prominent stamens.	Both names are accepted.
Ochnaceae	<i>Lophira lanceolata</i> Tiegh. ex Keay	Ochna family. Mostly woody plants with simple leaves and usually five-part flowers. Family features vary, so flowers and fruit are important for identification.	Accepted name.

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Fabaceae	<i>Pterocarpus erinaceus</i> Poir. <i>Afzelia africana</i> Sm. ex Pers. <i>Erythrophleum suaveolens</i> (Guill. & Perr.) Brenan <i>Daniellia thurifera</i> Benn. <i>Dialium guineense</i> Willd.	Legume family. Fruit is typically a pod. Leaves are often compound. Flowers vary greatly and are not always pea-shaped.	All five names are accepted. Do not identify this family from flower shape alone.
Chrysobalanaceae	<i>Parinari excelsa</i> Sabine	Cocoplum family. Mostly trees or shrubs with simple alternate leaves. The fruit is commonly a drupe.	Accepted name.
Moraceae	<i>Ficus exasperata</i> Vahl <i>Milicia regia</i> (A.Chev.) C.C.Berg	Fig or mulberry family. Small flowers are often grouped into specialised structures. Latex is common, but it is not milky in every species.	Both names are accepted. The earlier statement that all members have milky sap was too broad.
Combretaceae	<i>Terminalia ivorensis</i> A.Chev.	Combretum family. Mostly tropical trees or shrubs with simple leaves. Flowers have an inferior ovary; fruits are often winged, ridged or angled.	Accepted name. The former explanation linking the family name to burning or firewood was unsupported and has been removed.
Anisophylleaceae	<i>Anisophyllea laurina</i> R.Br. ex Sabine	Anisophyllea family. In this genus, leaves may differ in size and shape and are often arranged in two opposite rows along the twig.	Corrected from Meliaceae. This species belongs to Anisophylleaceae.
Clusiaceae	<i>Pentadesma butyracea</i> Sabine	Garcinia family. Mostly woody plants with opposite, often leathery leaves. Latex or resin is common, and flowers often have many stamens.	Accepted name.
Phyllanthaceae	<i>Margaritaria discoidea</i> (Baill.) G.L.Webster	Phyllanthus family. Leaves are simple and often arranged in two rows. Flowers are small and commonly unisexual; fruits are often capsules.	Corrected accepted name. Phyllanthus discoideus is a synonym of Margaritaria discoidea.