



Plant Identification - Steps to Identify an Unknown Plant

1. Look around for other examples of the plant.
2. Determine overall size and shape of plant. Is it the natural size and shape or has the plant been sheared or pruned into an unnatural shape?
3. Take photos: from a distance (the whole plant near something for context) and close up. Take a photo of leaves, any flowers or fruit that might be present.
4. Determine the leaf: simple or compound, smooth or fuzzy surface? Is the margin smooth, wavy or toothed? Venation pattern.
5. What is the leaf arrangement - how many leaves per node?
6. Crush a leaf and/or stem. Is there a distinct odor?
7. Look at the stem. Is it armed, square or otherwise distinctive?
8. Collect a sample if possible. Keep the sample cool and slightly moist in a paper bag. Use a plastic bag if necessary but allow air flow and do not over moisten the sample or it will rot or mold will form.
9. Which of the plant groups on the plant list best fits the unknown plant? (tree, shrub, palm, grass, vine, succulent, groundcover) Make your best guess.
10. Describe the plant to a trusted resource and share the sample for possible identification.
11. Plant identification apps can be helpful. Perhaps use 2 different ones for cross-reference.
12. Use a paper or online plant resource, see the Plant Identification Resource List for options.