11. Across "O" Avenue from the American sycamore, three large Norway maples (Acer platanoides) are located on the south side of Saint Peter's Episcopal Church. Norway maple is a very common tree in La Grande. It provides a deep shade, and this row of Norway maples is a cool place to be on a hot summer day. The leaves are similar to those of the sugar maple, but the leaf tips come to a sharper point. Its bark is covered with a series of narrow ridges and furrows, and it is darker than that of the sugar maple. In April, before the leaves emerge, the branch tips are covered with bright, light green flowers.

12. Head west on "O" Avenue to Fourth Street. Turn right on Fourth Street, heading north. The first row of trees that you come to are Capital flowering pears (Pyrus callista 'Capital'). This is a columnar variety of the ornamental flowering pear. Its narrow, upright form allows it to be planted where available growing space is limited. Around the end of April, its branches become covered with clusters of showy, white flowers. Although beautiful in appearance, the flowers have an unpleasant smell.

13. Continuing north, the next trees on Fourth Street are American elms (Ulmus americana). Gracefully arching branches give the American elm a beautiful, symmetrical appearance. The profile of the American elm is often described as "vase-shaped". American elms were once widely planted throughout this country, and they lined the streets of many American cities and towns. These American elms on Fourth Street escaped the Dutch elm disease that killed many of La Grande's elm trees in and around the 1970s. Fortunately, Dutch elm disease hasn't been reported in the La Grande area lately. We are truly fortunate to have these beautiful trees in our community.

14. Continue north on Fourth Street, crossing Penn Avenue. After passing two young sugar maples, the rest of this block is lined with a row of green ash (Fraxinus pennsylvanica). These trees, planted in 1995, are known as the "Patmore" variety. Each leaf is divided into five or more individual leaflets. The fall color is an attractive, golden yellow.

15. Continue walking north, cross Spring Avenue, and then turn right on Depot Street. You are now heading northeast on Depot Street. On the right-hand side of the sidewalk, next to the Credit Union building, are two Douglas-firs (Pseudotsuga menziesii). Douglas-fir is a magnificent native forest tree. There are probably more Douglas-firs in Oregon than any other species. It's an important source of lumber and also widely grown for use as a Christmas tree. It's sometimes called red fir because of its wood color. Some of the tallest trees in La Grande are Douglas-firs that were transplanted from local forests. Douglas-fir is the state tree of Oregon. It was named for David Douglas, a Scottish botanist who explored the northwest in the 1820s.

16. Continue on Depot Street to the end of the block. The large evergreen tree near the corner of Depot and Fifth Streets is a Norway spruce (Picea abies). Curved branches and pendulous twigs give this tree a graceful, weeping appearance. Its cones are longer than the other spruces that you are likely to see in La Grande.

17. Cross Fifth Street and follow Depot Street to Washington Avenue. Turn right at Washington Avenue, and you will see three bristlecone pines (Pinus aristata) in front of the Post Office building. This ornamental plum is a gracefully spreading small tree. It has bright pink double flowers that measure up to an inch in diameter. They usually bloom during Oregon's Arbor Week, the first week of April. The flowers bloom before the leaves emerge, so the pink blossoms show up nicely against the bare twigs. The new leaves are reddish-purple as they emerge, fading to green by summer.

This completes our walking tour of trees. To return to the starting point, continue walking down Washington Avenue for another 1½ blocks. We hope you enjoyed your walk in La Grande's urban forest.
Welcome to La Grande’s urban forest! You are invited on a walking tour of La Grande’s trees. You will be introduced to 17 different kinds of trees and will learn ways to recognize them. It will take about an hour to complete the tour.

La Grande’s trees are important to our local identity and sense of place. It’s been said that our valley was known as “Cop Copi” by the Native Americans because of the cottonwoods growing along the Grande Ronde River. Later, local trees provided a welcome oasis for Oregon Trail pioneers. As La Grande was settled, trees were widely planted throughout the growing City. By 1923, the local newspaper was able to report: “La Grande is recognized as the prettiest town in Eastern Oregon because of the elegant trees it now has.” The larger, older trees that you will see along this tree walk were planted between about 1900 and 1930.

This heritage continues into the present. La Grande has an active, award-winning Urban Forestry Program. We have been a Tree City USA since 1990, and in 1996, La Grande was honored as the Tree City of the Year for the State of Oregon. Our Urban Forestry Consultant and volunteers have also received several awards at the national, State and local levels. Homeowners, volunteers, City Council, City Staff and the Community Landscape and Forestry Commission have all worked together to keep our urban forest healthy. Although this walking tour features some of our older trees, you will also see younger trees along the route that have been planted over the last several years. Our urban forest is a living, growing ecosystem, and La Grande remains a welcome oasis for travelers.

Trees are living things that depend on us for their protection. They beautify our surroundings, enhance the environment and help our economy. Please respect them, touch them gently and don’t peel their bark or remove their leaves. (They need them more than we do!) Please do touch their bark, smell their flowers and listen to the sound of their leaves in the wind. Most of the trees on our walking tour are located in the public planting strip, between the sidewalk and curb. Please respect the property of others and do not walk on the private land behind the sidewalk.

Our trees connect us to the natural world and they reflect the changing seasons. You may want to revisit this tree walk at different times of the year. Enjoy your walk among the trees!

The Tour

Our tour begins at the corner of Spring and Washington Avenues, next to the Presbyterian Church.

1. The large and gracefully spreading tree on the corner is a silver maple (Acer saccharinum). The undersides of its leaves have a silver color and the bark is a silvery-gray. The leaves have a familiar "maple leaf" shape, but they are deeply cut between the lobes. Silver maples are one of the first trees to bloom each year. In a mild winter, their small, reddish-brown flower buds open as early as late February. This large silver maple measures over 52 inches in diameter at breast height and is about 65 feet tall. Its branches spread more than 80 feet.

2. As you leave the silver maple, walk along Spring Avenue with the Presbyterian Church on your right. You are now heading west, and the church building is to the north. The next tree you will come to is a black locust (Robinia pseudoacacia). Early settlers brought locust seeds from the eastern U.S. and planted them in great numbers throughout eastern Oregon. In early summer, clusters of fragrant, white flowers cover the branches. Seedpods develop and hang from the twigs throughout the winter months. Black locust trees are extremely long-lived. As you work your way around the corner to the next tree, you will notice a large, shady locust tree. If you look closely, you will see its rough bark and distinctive leaf shape. Tree #2 is a black locust (Robinia pseudoacacia).

3. Continue west on Spring Avenue and walk to the end of the block. At the northeast corner of Spring Avenue and Sixth Street is a sycamore maple (Acer pseudoplatanus). This tree is native to Europe and western Asia. The bark of the sycamore maple flakes into gray scales, exposing a smooth, light colored bark with patches of orange underneath. Although this tree is truly a maple, its exfoliating bark resembles that of the sycamore tree, giving the sycamore maple its name. You will see an American sycamore tree later on this walk, so you can compare them for yourself.

4. Continue west on Spring Avenue and walk across Sixth Street. You will find a row of flowering plums (Prunus caroliniana 'Thundercloud') along the south side of the First Baptist Church. The leaves are a deep purple. If you are lucky enough to experience these trees in full bloom, you’ll find fragrant, pink blossoms covering the branches. Flowering usually occurs in early April.

5. Further west on Spring Avenue, you’ll see the white trunks of the European white birch (Betula pendula). The white twigs and side branches give these trees a delicate appearance. Their leaves and branches move gracefully in a breeze. In recent years, we have lost many branches to the insect known as the bronze birch borer.

6. Next to the birches, the trees with dark colored bark are little-leaf lindens (Tilia cordata). In the early summer small, yellowish flowers bloom among the dark green leaves. If the lindens are flowering during your visit, be sure to stop under their branches and smell their fragrance. Bees love linden flowers, so watch out! Their leaves are heart-shaped. Little-leaf lindens are native to Europe, where they have been planted since ancient times. In England, the linden is known as the "lime tree".

7. Turn left at the corner, cross Spring Avenue, and walk south on Fifth Street for one block. Near the northeast corner of Fifth Street and Penn Avenue, you will find an Engelmann spruce (Picea engelmannii) in front of 1601 Fifth Street. Engelmann spruce is native to the local mountains, and this tree was probably transplanted here from the mountains. The species inhabits higher elevations and moist creek areas, but it has proven to be quite adaptable to growing in town. The needles of this species range from green to bluish in color. It resembles its close relative, the Colorado blue spruce. The light gray bark grows scaly with age, revealing a reddish-purple color underneath.

8. Continue south across Penn Avenue, and then cross over to the west side of Fifth Street and turn left. The two first trees on the west side of Fifth Street are Spring Snow crabapples (Malus 'Spring Snow'). As the name implies, this tree is covered with pure white flowers in the spring. They typically start to bloom near the end of April. The branches are a greenish to golden color, and the tree has a naturally rounded shape. This variety of crabapple is unusual because it is sterile and produces no fruit.

9. Walk back across Fifth Street and head south to the corner of Fifth Street and "O" Avenue. As you stand at the corner and look east along "O" Avenue, the first tree that you see in front of 1128 "A" Avenue is a sugar maple (Acer saccharinum). The sugar maple is a handsome tree, with branches that ascend to give the tree an oval shape. Its gray bark forms large, irregular plates. The sweet sap of the sugar maple is the source of maple syrup. (Try saying that three times fast!) Its fall color can be spectacular, with yellow, orange and red colors all displayed at once. Much of New England’s famous autumn beauty comes from the colors of its sugar maples. Its leaf is represented on the Canadian flag, and its wood is the hard maple used in fine woodworking. Can you identify the other sugar maple in the row of trees on the Fifth Street side of this address? There are also two sycamore maples (tree #3) and a Norway maple there as well. You’ll be introduced to Norway maples soon (tree #11).

10. Head south across "O" Avenue, and then turn right and cross Fifth Street heading west. With The Observer newspaper building on your left, continue west on "O" Avenue.

You will pass a young London plane tree (Platanus x acerifolia) that was planted by the City of La Grande as part of newspaper reporter Ted Nelson. Continue west to the last tree on this block, a very large American sycamore (Platanus occidentalis). These two species are closely related. The London plane tree is the result of a hybrid cross between the American sycamore and the Oriental plane tree. These trees are known for their distinctive peeling bark and the unique, round, dry fruits that hang from the branches.