# BLACK ASH

*Mi'kmaq Name – Wisqoq*
*Scientific Name – Fraxinus nigra*

**COSEWIC Status: Threatened*

Photos:
(1) Wisqoq.com
(2) Manitoba Forestry
(3) Peter M. Duizk

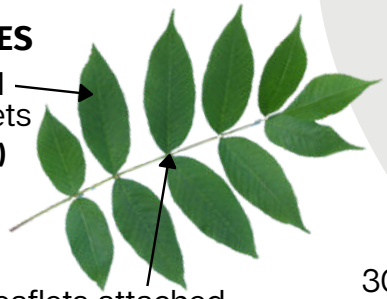
## IDENTIFICATION TIPS:

**MATURE BARK**
Tight, dark furrows

(1)


**YOUNG BARK**
Soft, cork-like

**LEAVES**
7-11 leaflets
(2)



Leaflets attached directly to the central petiole

**BUDS**
Dark brown to black in color

Space between last set of lateral buds and terminal bud

**FLOWERS**
Form in clusters
(3)
Purple-yellow flowers

Emerge before the leaves

**COSEWIC = Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada*

## DESCRIPTION

Black Ash (*Fraxinus nigra*) are slender, short, deciduous trees with pinnately compound leaves that are situated on the twig in an **opposite arrangement**. Each leaf contains 7-11 leaflets which are attached **directly to the central petiole**. This tree produces purple-yellow flowers that form in clusters and erupt from a **dark, brown-black bud**. Younger bark is characteristically soft, and is often described as **cork-like**, while mature bark is **tight, scaly, light grey with dark furrows**.

## THREATS

- The **Emerald Ash Borer (EAB)** (*Agrilus planipennis*) is an invasive insect introduced to North America from Asia. This insect has been detected in neighboring provinces including New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Although it has not been detected on Prince Edward Island as of 2023, **this insect is capable of killing 99% of infected ash trees within 8-10 years**. For more information on the identification of this insect please visit: https://peiinvasives.com/emerald-ash-borer/
- Loss of habitat as a result of increased forest harvesting and silviculture, residential and commercial development.
- Loss of habitat as a result of climate change.

Black Ash (*Fraxinus nigra*) - Nebraska Creek Natural Area
Photo Credit: Island Nature Trust

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## HABITAT

On Prince Edward Island, Black Ash are **water-tolerant** and often found in swampy, forested wetlands with lower acidity that are deciduous or mixed wood dominated. Although they have been located in all light conditions, those of best health were located in areas where sunlight was "**patchy**" or "**dappled**" on the forest floor.

Black Ash (*Fraxinus nigra*) - Bear River Riparian Zone Natural Area
Photo Credit: Island Nature Trust

## ECOLOGICAL ROLE

Black Ash typically exist within the lower canopy level, and have a high-tolerance for water-logged soils with little oxygen; therefore, they are often able to out-compete other species that occur in similar conditions. Ecosystems containing Black Ash are usually fairly undisturbed, making them **refuges for rare plant species**. Species that are often associated with Black Ash on PEI include White Elm (*Ulmus americana*), Eastern White Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), and White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*).

Content: Abegweit Conservation Society, Government of Canada; The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq; Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada; Elder Francis Jadis; Macphail Woods Ecological Forestry Project; Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI; and Mi'kmawey Forestry.

## REPRODUCTION

Black Ash trees can either bear male-only flowers, female-only flowers, or both on the same tree and typically begin producing seed around 30 years of age. After age 30 **seed production is irregular**, and can occur in **7-8 year intervals**. In order to germinate, seeds require a deep physiological dormancy period where they are exposed to moisture as well as periods of high and low temperatures. Under ideal conditions, Black Ash trees **can live for 200 to 300 years**.

Photo Credit: Indigenous Tourism Association
Mi'kmaw artisan: Elder Francis Jadis, Scotchfort, PE

## TRADITIONAL USE

**Wisqoq** is an important part of Mi'kmaq culture and has been used for several hundred years to craft baskets, snowshoe frames, canoe ribs, and axe handles. Mi'kmaq people had a nomadic way of living, and **weaving baskets** helped improve their ability to transport food and supplies from their summer encampments by bodies of water to inland winter camps. Wisqoq is uniquely prepared for basket weaving by shaving and pounding sections of the bole until they split into thin and flexible, but strong strips. This craft continues to be taught to future generations.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Reporting signs of disease or Emerald Ash Borer to the PEI Invasive Species Council.
- Supporting groups who are working to conserve **forested wetlands**.
- Report any sightings of Black Ash using:
  - **iNaturalist.org** or;
  - Contacting **Julie-Lynn Zahavich**, the Forest Conservation Specialist for the PEI Fish and Wildlife Division at **jlzahavich@gov.pe.ca**

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