

Carleton University
Early Summer 2025 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

**ENGL 4115A/5900S: Culture and the Text
Plant Literacy and Literature**

**Prerequisites: fourth-year standing or permission of the department
Preclusions: N/A**

**Instructor: Robin Norris
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***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change.
A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

Course description: Plants have been important throughout human history for reasons of both survival and culture. Although plants have been central to mythologies and folklore around the globe, today our personal awareness of plants is at an all-time low. This is an experiential learning course that combines fieldwork, experiential learning, and text-based discussion to develop plant literacy and increase awareness of the plant life in our environment while redefining our understanding of literacy. Writing assignments will emphasize reflection on the experiential learning aspects of the course. The intersecting goals of the course are to explore the concept of literacy while expanding our ability to perceive and engage with plants, as well as considering new methods of observation and understanding by challenging fixed notions of knowledge and being.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will develop their understanding of the concepts of literacy and plant literacy.
Students will increase their plant vocabulary by learning new words and their plant literacy by learning to identify a number of plants that were previously unfamiliar to them.
Students will read and respond to fundamental literary texts and cultural concepts about plants.
Students will analyze differences in how plants have been catalogued, categorized, written about, and engaged with in various cultural contexts.

Texts:

These two books have been ordered at the campus bookstore:
Eckenwalder, Metsger, et al. *A Field Guide to Trees of Ontario* (ROM, 2023). \$30
Holten, *Language of Trees: A Rewilding of Literature and Landscape* (Tin House, 2024). \$30

Evaluation:

I am currently developing an alternative assessment approach to this course. We will finalize this plan together in the first week of class. Coursework may include: attendance and participation, reflective writing facilitation, facilitation of an experiential learning activity, tree identification exercise, a fieldwork presentation, and submission of discussion questions.