



# UNDERSTORY PLANTS

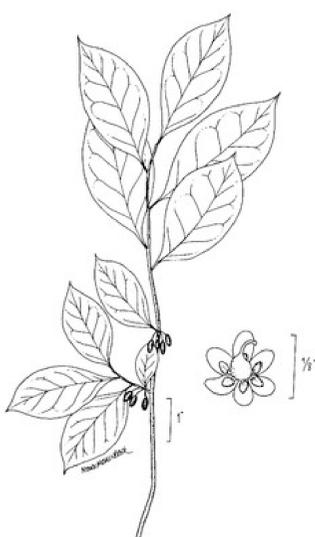
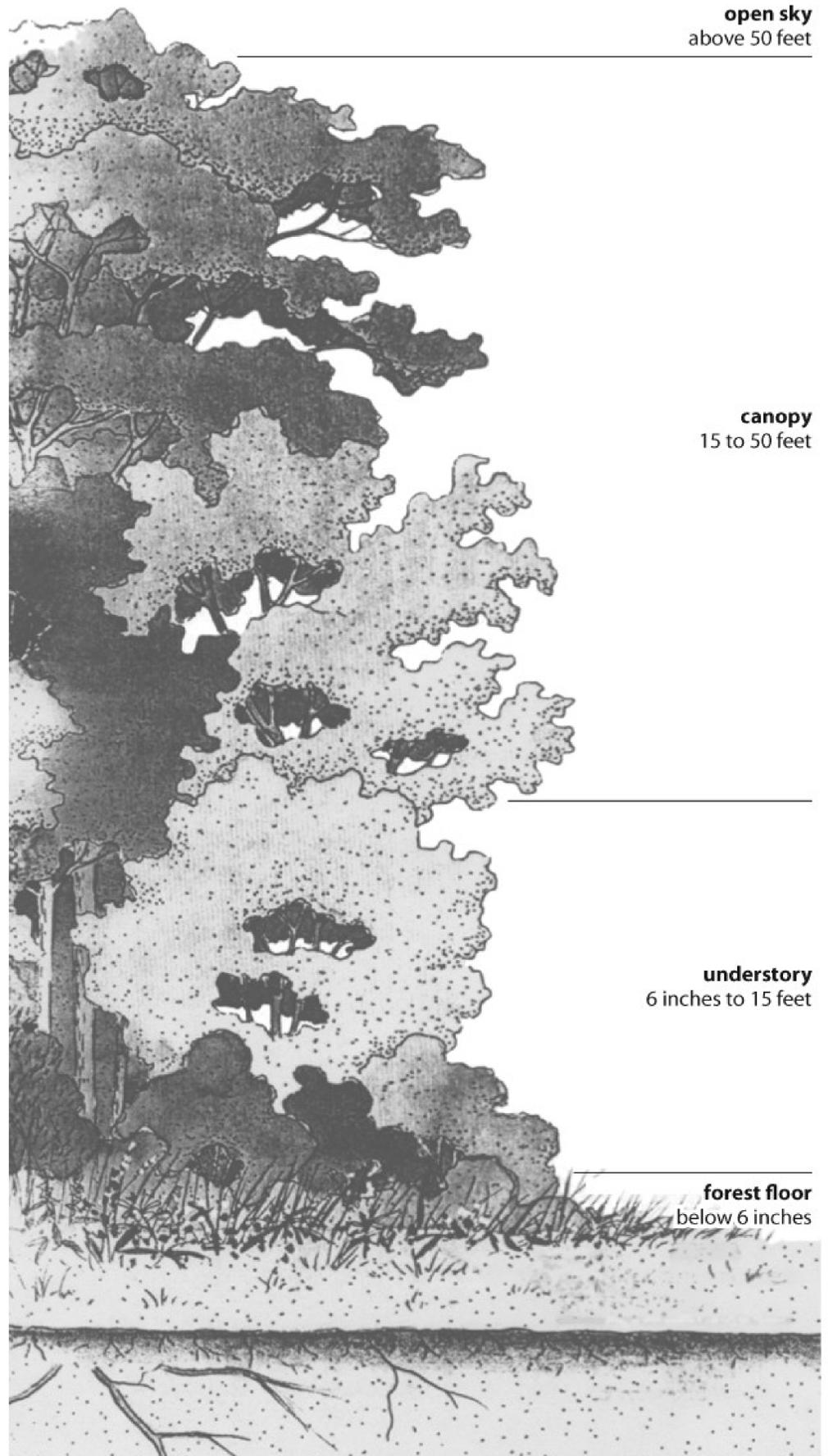
A forest ecosystem is comprised of many layers: canopy, understory, and forest floor. The understory is the layer of a forest made up of shrubs as well as small trees growing to reach the canopy layer. Less light is able to reach this lower layer, so understory plants must be able to complete their life cycle in the shade of the forest canopy.

Notice the difference in plant composition between where you're standing and the wetland, the depressed area behind this sign. Two feet in elevation makes a big difference! The roots of the plant species in the higher area around this sign would suffocate under standing water, while the roots in the wetland plant species are adapted to survive part of the year under water. Understory shrubs prefer the drier, well-drained areas outside of the wetland. Shrubs around this sign include Spicebush, Amur Honeysuckle, and Pawpaw.

The first shrub just to the left of this sign is Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), a shrub known for its spicy aroma. Clusters of small greenish-yellow flowers bloom along the branches in early spring before the leaves emerge. Red berries attract birds in late summer, and thick, light green leaves turn yellow in autumn.

The next shrub to the left of this sign is Amur Honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*), the most common shrub in this understory. It is an invasive species from Asia imported to control erosion and to serve as an ornamental shrub. It grows fast, forms dense thickets with long-lasting foliage, and native plants have difficulty competing in these areas. Amur Honeysuckle's sweet, white flowers bloom from mid spring to early summer. The fruit is a red berry that is poisonous to humans but is eaten by birds, which spread the seeds in their droppings.

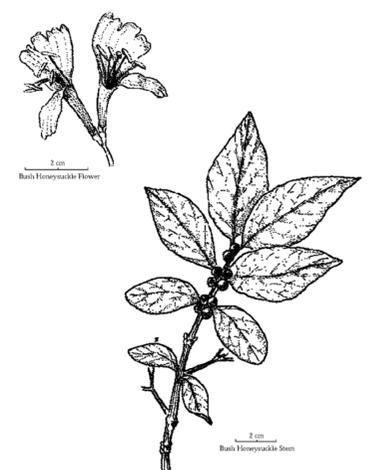
Finally, 15 feet to the left of this sign are Pawpaws (*Asimina triloba*), clustered shrubs of large, dark green leaves with a scent similar to a green bell pepper. Spring brings flowers with petals that vary from purple to red-brown. The edible fruit is easily seen in autumn when the leaves turn a rusty yellow. Bark of the Pawpaw is dark brown and blotched with gray spots.



Spicebush



PawPaw



Amur Honeysuckle