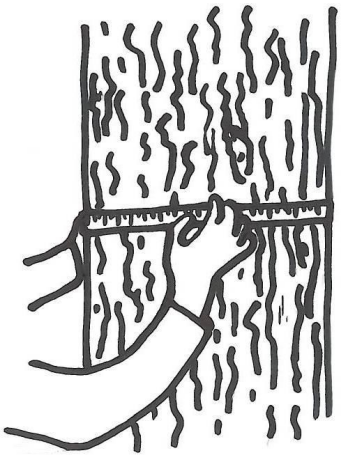
Estimating the age of a tree

You probably already know that if you count the rings on a tree stump, you can estimate how old the tree was when it was chopped down. This is because a tree will grow a new layer of bark about once a year, therefore 1 ring is equal to about 1 year. Scientists can even tell what the weather was like by examining the width of the tree rings!

But what happens if you want to know the age of a living tree? By measuring around the tree and carrying out a simple calculation you can make a very rough estimate about how old a living tree is.

What to do

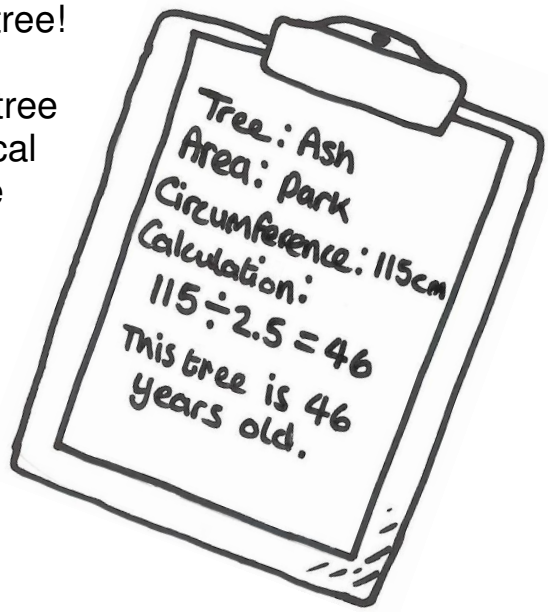
Choose a deciduous tree (a tree that drops its leaves in winter) in woodland or an open space such as a park. With the help of a friend, use a tape measure to measure the circumference of the tree trunk at a height of around 1 metre. Try to avoid any lumps on the trunk surface.



Now use the information below to work out how many years old your tree is.

If you have chosen a tree in woodland, divide the circumference in centimetres by 1.25.
If you have chosen a tree in an open space, divide the circumference in centimetres by 2.5.

You should now have an approximate age of your tree!



Use an identification guide to find out what type of tree it is. You could create a map of the trees in your local area, with records on their age and type. What else could you include?

Why do you think it is important to preserve old trees?
Why is there a difference when calculating tree ages in woodland and open spaces?

A tree identification guide can be found at:
http://www.opalexplorenature.org/sites/default/files/7/file/OPAL-Tree-chart-web.pdf