

# JoVE: Science Education

## Tree Survey: Point-Centered Quarter Sampling Method

--Manuscript Draft--

<b>Manuscript Number:</b>	10060
<b>Full Title:</b>	Tree Survey: Point-Centered Quarter Sampling Method
<b>Article Type:</b>	Manuscript
<b>Section/Category:</b>	Manuscript Submission
<b>Corresponding Author:</b>	Kimberly Frye UNITED STATES
<b>Corresponding Author Secondary Information:</b>	
<b>Corresponding Author's Institution:</b>	
<b>Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:</b>	
<b>First Author:</b>	Margaret Workman
<b>First Author Secondary Information:</b>	
<b>Order of Authors:</b>	Margaret Workman Kimberly Frye
<b>Order of Authors Secondary Information:</b>	

**PI Name:** Margaret Workman and Kimberly Frye

## **Science Education Title** Tree Survey: Point-Centered Quarter Sampling Method

### **Overview**

A number of methods are available for sampling forest communities. Point-centered quarter is one such method. It is used to gather information on the density, frequency, and coverage of tree species found in a forest. This information provides the ability to estimate the number of individual trees encountered, how often a certain tree occurs, how common the tree is compared to other trees, and the size of the tree. Compared to the standard plot analysis, the point-centered quarter method is more efficient, which is a major advantage.

### **Principles**

In the point-centered quarter method, a point in the forest is identified and the area around it is separated into four quarters. In each quarter, the nearest tree with a diameter-at-base-height (dbh) of  $> 40$  cm is identified. This is considered the "large tree" sample. In each quarter, the nearest tree with a dbh  $> 2.5$  cm and  $< 40$  cm is identified. This is considered the "small tree" sample. The dbh is the diameter (in cm) of a tree measured at  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet above the existing grade. Identifying a large tree and small tree in each quadrant allows us to compare the overstory (the trees in a forest whose crowns constitute the highest layer of vegetation in a forest, typically forming the canopy) to the understory (vegetation growing beneath the forest canopy without penetrating it to any extent).

### **Procedure**

#### **1. Tree Survey**

1.1. Establish a 150 meter transect in the forest.

1.2. Place a stake every 50 meters. Each stake (point) represents the center of four compass directions (N, E, W, S) which divide the sampling site into four quarters.

1.3. In each quarter, the distance is measured from the stake to the nearest tree  $> 40$  cm, regardless of species. Only one large tree per quarter should be measured, so a total of 16 trees are recorded in the large tree category. Record the distance in cm for each.

1.4. Collect a leaf sample from each tree. Be sure to note if the leaves are alternate (Figure 1), whorled (Figure 2), or opposite (Figure 3) before removing them. Place the sample on the herbarium paper, properly labeled with the tree number, and place in a plant press for later identification.

1.5. Measure the diameter of the tree at  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet above the existing grade (dbh). Record the dbh.

1.6. Repeat steps 1.3 – 1.5 for the nearest tree  $< 40$  cm and  $> 2.5$  cm in each quadrant. These trees are labeled the small tree category.

1.7. Using the leaf samples, identify the species of each tree in the 16 large trees and the 16 small trees categories.

2. **Calculations** - do separate analyses for large trees and small trees.

2.1. Calculate the mean point-to-tree distance for the entire sample of large trees, regardless of species. Calculate the mean point-to-tree distance for the entire sample of small trees, regardless of species.

2.2. Calculate the average density (the number of trees/hectare) for both the large trees and the small trees.

$$\text{Average Density} = \frac{10,000\text{m}^2/\text{hectare}}{(\text{Ave. point-to-tree distance in m})^2/\text{tree}}$$

2.3. Determine the density *by species* for both the large trees and small trees. Then, count the number of individuals in the sample for each species and record (Table 1). The total number of individuals counted is 16.

$$\text{Relative Density} = (\text{number of individuals of a species}/16) \times 100\%$$

And

$$\text{Density} = (\text{Relative Density}/100) \times \text{Average Density}$$

2.4 Determine and record the basal area by species (Table 2-3 and Table 4).

2.4.1 Convert the diameter measures into areas for all trees sampled ( $a = \pi r^2$ ).

2.4.2 Calculate the mean basal area for each species, i.e. take the average.

2.4.3 For each species, calculate the Basal Area and Relative Basal Area.

$$\text{Basal Area} = \text{Density} \times \text{Average Basal Area}$$

And

$$\text{Relative Basal Area} = (\text{Basal Area} / \text{Total Basal Area}) \times 100$$

The Total Basal Area is the total basal area for all species (sum all BAs).

2.5 Determine and record frequency by species (Table 5 and Table 6-3).

$$\text{Frequency} = (\text{no. of points at which species occurs}/\text{total no. of points sampled})$$

And

$$\text{Relative Frequency} = (\text{Frequency}/\text{Total Frequency for all species}) \times 100$$

**Comment [JR1]:** For the Tables, instead of having individual tables for Large and Small trees, I've combined them into one table format. Each category is clearly separated still, but now it's in one document instead of two. Let me know if it should be changed back.

2.6 Calculate and record an Importance Value and Relative Importance Value by species ([Table 47 and Table 8](#)).

Importance Value = Relative Density + Relative Frequency + Relative Basal Area

And

Relative Importance Value = (Importance Value / Total Imp. Value for all species) x 100

2.7 Make a graph that depicts the importance value for each species on the y-axis and the species on the x-axis. Place them on the y-axis in order of Increasing Importance values. There should be one line for large trees and one line for small trees.

## Representative Results

The point-centered quarter tree survey method produces three quantitative measures: the relative density, the relative frequency, and the relative basal area. These three values are added together to give the Importance Value of that species. This is then converted to a relative importance value (Table 5).

The importance value of a species can reach a maximum of 300 in a survey that only finds one species present. A high importance value does not necessarily mean that the species is important to the health of the forest, it merely means that the species currently dominates the forest structure (Figure 4).

Trees are an important natural resource that help a city's environment, health, and overall quality of life. Therefore, having a good understanding of the composition of the forest is essential to maintaining this resource. For example, if the forest is very diverse, it can help minimize the impact from a species-specific insect or disease. If the understory shows a high frequency of invasive trees, it may indicate that they are beginning to outcompete and displace the native trees.

## Applications

Tree surveys are an important technique for both private and public stakeholders. They can provide helpful information to allow land managers to make informed decisions. A community may want to do a tree inventory to determine if there is a need for a forestry program. For example, the survey may reveal many dead or diseased trees (Figure 5) and indicate the need for more plantings. The survey may also help the community set up a maintenance schedule to prevent damage from hazardous trees. Lastly, the survey can help communities with land management decisions. Knowing the species diversity in a forest can allow the managers develop a plan for planting (Figure 6). For example, they can set guidelines such as, "Do not plant trees from a species that comprise more than x% of the forest."

Tree surveys help quantify a forest's value as a natural resource. Knowing the forest structure allows forest managers to calculate the worth of the services that the trees provide, such as air pollution control, carbon capture and storage, and energy use reductions.

## Legend

Figure 1: An example of the basic "alternate" leaf arrangement. Each leaf is at a different point on the stem.

Photo credit: "Alternate". Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikipedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Alternate.png#mediaviewer/File:Alternate.png>

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Figure 4: A bar graph of the Importance Value of trees in the Sommes Woods.

Figure 5: A photo of a forest with potentially diseased trees. A tree survey could help detect the presence of dying trees, so managers could plant new trees to maintain forest levels.

Figure 6: A photo of a healthy, diverse forest. A tree survey could help managers develop a plan for planting proper trees to maintain levels particular species numbers (so one tree type doesn't take over a forest, for example).

Table 1: A table to fill out information regarding the density of large and small trees.

Table 2: A table to fill out information regarding the basal area of large and small trees.

Table 3: A table to fill out information regarding the frequency of large and small trees.

Table 4: A table to fill out information regarding the Importance Value and Relative Importance Value of large and small trees.

Table 5: A table detailing representative results gathered from the point-centered tree survey method.

Large Trees			
	# of individuals	Relative Density (%)	Density (trees/hectare)
Species 1 _____			
Species 2 _____			
Species 3 _____			
Species 4 _____			
Species 5 _____			
Species 6 _____			
Small Trees			
	# of individuals	Relative Density (%)	Density (trees/hectare)
Species 1 _____			
Species 2 _____			
Species 3 _____			
Species 4 _____			
Species 5 _____			
Species 6 _____			

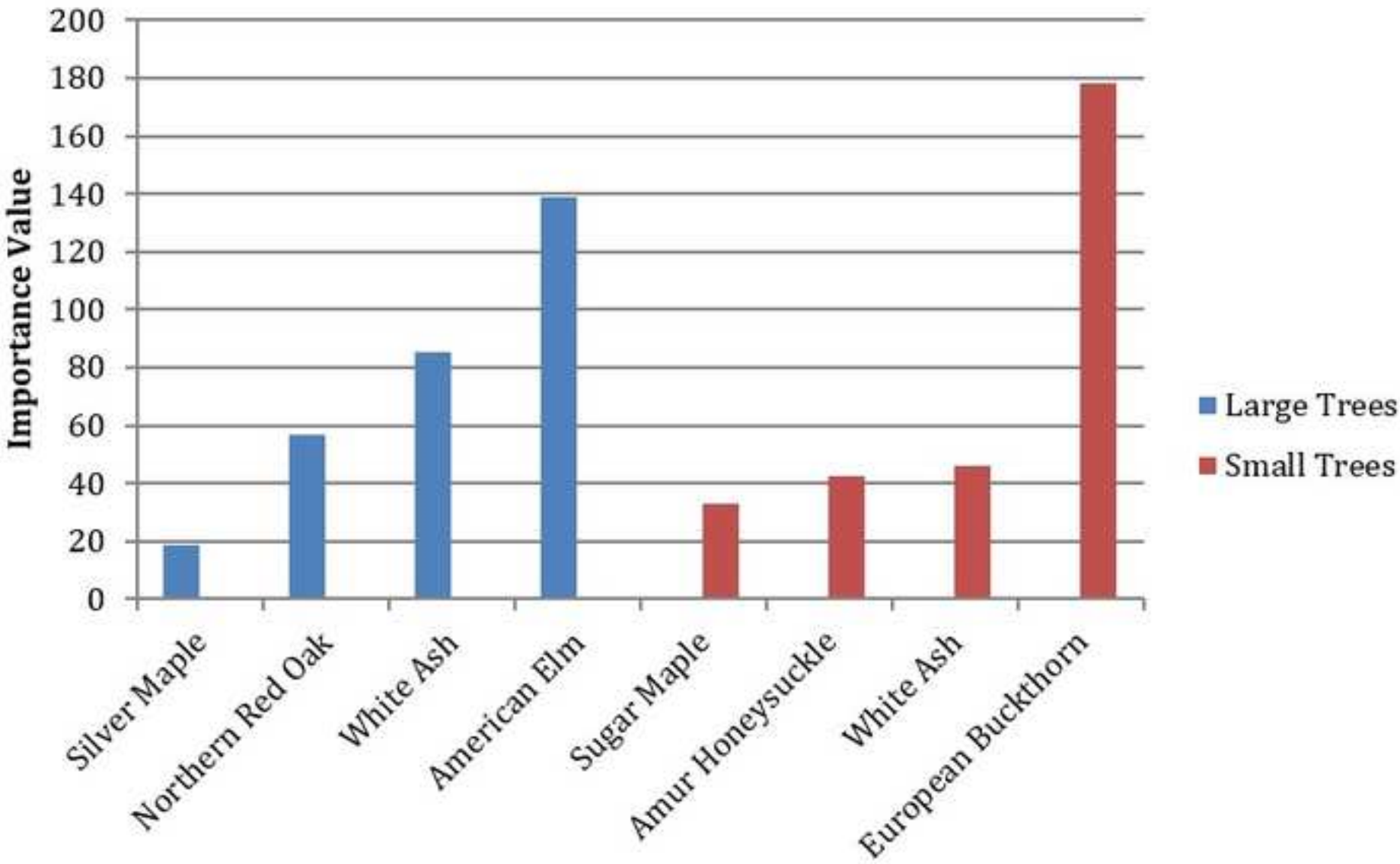
Large Trees			
	Average Basal Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Basal Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Relative Basal Area
Species 1 _____			
Species 2 _____			
Species 3 _____			
Species 4 _____			
Species 5 _____			
Species 6 _____			
TOTAL		Total Basal Area =	
Small Trees			
	Average Basal Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Basal Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Relative Basal Area
Species 1 _____			
Species 2 _____			
Species 3 _____			
Species 4 _____			
Species 5 _____			
Species 6 _____			
TOTAL		Total Basal Area =	

Large Trees			
	# of points	Frequency	Relative Frequency
Species 1 _____			
Species 2 _____			
Species 3 _____			
Species 4 _____			
Species 5 _____			
Species 6 _____			
TOTAL		Total Frequency =	
Small Trees			
	# of points	Frequency	Relative Frequency
Species 1 _____			
Species 2 _____			
Species 3 _____			
Species 4 _____			
Species 5 _____			
Species 6 _____			
TOTAL		Total Frequency =	



Large Trees					
	Relative Density	Relative Frequency	Relative Basal Area	Importance Value	Relative Importance Value
Species 1 _____					
Species 2 _____					
Species 3 _____					
Species 4 _____					
Species 5 _____					
Species 6 _____					
				Total IV =	
Small Trees					
	Relative Density	Relative Frequency	Relative Basal Area	Importance Value	Relative Importance Value
Species 1 _____					
Species 2 _____					
Species 3 _____					
Species 4 _____					
Species 5 _____					
Species 6 _____					
				Total IV =	

# Importance Value of Large and Small Trees in Sommes Woods











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## Overview

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In a fixed-area plot sampling, a small portion of the total area of the forest is examined. In this small subsample, the density is determined directly by counting and identifying each tree. The ratio between size of the subplot and the overall forest size is used to determine the density for the entire forest.

## Principles

In the point-centered quarter method, a point in the forest is identified and the area around it is separated into four quarters. In each quarter, the nearest tree with a diameter-at-base-height (dbh) of  $> 40$  cm is identified. This is considered the “large tree” sample. In each quarter, the nearest tree with a dbh  $> 2.5$  cm and  $< 40$  cm is identified. This is considered the “small tree” sample. The dbh is the diameter (in cm) of a tree measured at  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet above the existing grade. Identifying a large tree and small tree in each quadrant provides the ability to compare the overstory (the trees in a forest whose crowns constitute the highest layer of vegetation in a forest, typically forming the canopy) to the understory (vegetation growing beneath the forest canopy without penetrating it to any extent).

Using these measurements, the Basal Area and Importance Value of each tree species is calculated. The basal area is the cross-sectional area (in  $m^2$ ) of a single tree at breast height ( $4\frac{1}{2}$  ft above the ground). The basal area of all trees of a species can be calculated to understand the species density in a site. This is used, instead of the number of trees per area, to take into account the size of the trees. The Importance Value of each species is calculated to understand the relative dominance of that species in a forest community. It is based on how commonly a species occurs across the forest, the total number of individuals of the species, and the total amount of forest area occupied by the species.

## Procedure

### 1. Tree Survey

1.1. Establish a 150 meter transect in the forest.



1.2. Place a stake every 50 meters. Each stake (point) represents the center of four compass directions (N, E, W, S) which divide the sampling site into four quarters.

1.3. In each quarter, the distance is measured from the stake to the nearest tree > 40 cm, regardless of species. Only one large tree per quarter should be measured, so a total of 16 trees are recorded in the large tree category. Record the distance in cm for each.

1.4. Collect a leaf sample from each tree. Be sure to note if the leaves are alternate (**Figure 1**), whorled (**Figure 2**), or opposite (**Figure 3**) before removing them. Place the sample on the herbarium paper, properly labeled with the tree number, and place in a plant press for later identification.

1.5. Using a field measurement tape, measure the diameter of the tree at 4½ feet above the existing grade (dbh). Record the dbh. If using a dbh tape, read the diameter directly off the tape. If using a regular measuring tape, measure the circumference of the tree and then calculate the diameter using the formula  $C = \pi d$ .

1.6. Repeat steps 1.3 – 1.5 for the nearest tree < 40 cm and > 2.5 cm in each quadrant. These trees are labeled the small tree category.

1.7. Using the leaf samples, identify the species of each tree in the 16 large trees and the 16 small trees categories.

2. **Calculations** - do separate analyses for large trees and small trees.

2.1. Calculate the mean point-to-tree distance for the entire sample of large trees, regardless of species. Calculate the mean point-to-tree distance for the entire sample of small trees, regardless of species.

2.2. Calculate the average density (the number of trees/hectare) for both the large trees and the small trees.

$$\text{Average Density} = \frac{10,000\text{m}^2/\text{hectare}}{(\text{Ave. point-to-tree distance in m})^2/\text{tree}}$$

2.3. Determine the density *by species* for both the large trees and small trees. Then, count the number of individuals in the sample for each species and record (**Table 1**). The total number of individuals counted is 16.

Relative Density = (number of individuals of a species/16) x 100%

And

Density = (Relative Density/100) x Average Density

2.4 Determine and record the basal area by species (**Table 2**).

2.4.1 Convert the diameter measures into areas for all trees sampled ( $a = \pi r^2$ ).

2.4.2 Calculate the mean basal area for each species, i.e. take the average.

2.4.3 For each species, calculate the Basal Area and Relative Basal Area.

Basal Area = Density x Average Basal Area

And

Relative Basal Area = (Basal Area / Total Basal Area) x 100

The Total Basal Area is the total basal area for all species (sum all BAs).

2.5 Determine and record frequency by species (**Table 3**).

Frequency = (no. of points at which species occurs/total no. of points sampled)

And

Relative Frequency = (Frequency/Total Frequency for all species) x 100

2.5.1 The frequency of each species is determined by comparing the number of points at which that species occurred out of the 4 points sampled. For example, if an American Elm is found at all 4 of the points, the frequency would be  $4/4 = 1$ . If a Silver Maple is found at 2 of the 4 points, the frequency would be  $2/4 = 0.5$ .

2.6 Calculate and record an Importance Value and Relative Importance Value by species (**Table 4**).

Importance Value = Relative Density + Relative Frequency + Relative Basal Area

And

Relative Importance Value = (Importance Value / Total Imp. Value for all species) x 100

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