

Let's practice sketching a leaf!

By Christine Elder

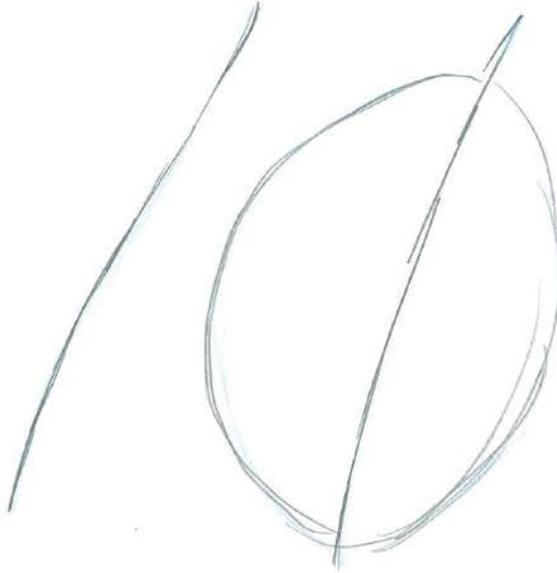
If you're new to sketching, drawing a simple leaf is a good place to start. Many leaves are relatively flat, allowing you to focus your attention on the practice of depicting shape, without getting overwhelmed with three-dimensional form. Hint: you can use most of these same steps to draw anything! Watch my [video tutorials](#) on sketching leaves on my [website](#):

1. Set aside about 10–20 minutes for this exercise. Find an interesting leaf that is smaller than half the size of your paper (or use leaf photos I've provided for you on the next page). Get a pencil & paper. Place your leaf on the paper.
2. Carefully observe the leaf first, noting its general size and shape before you start drawing.
3. Place the leaf on the left or right half of the paper. You'll start your drawing on the remaining half of the paper.
4. Using your pencil as a measuring tool, measure the width and length of the leaf; place marks onto the blank side of the paper that match those same measurements. This is the 'foundation' upon which you'll build your 'house.'
5. Using a very light touch, draw a single line to represent the stem and the main central vein.
6. Look at the overall shape of the leaf; for example, is it linear, oval, square, or rectangular?
7. Draw the shape that represents the outermost edges of your leaf. Again, use a very light touch, like you're just tickling the surface of the paper. Be gentle and loose with your line. Avoid erasing what you consider to be mistakes as these lines can actually be helpful in guiding you to be more accurate.
8. Now we'll firm up the lines that best represent the shape of our subject. Start at the stem. Slowly, and in a clockwise direction, draw the perimeter as if you are an ant crawling along the edge of the leaf. Frequently look back and forth between your subject and your sketch to 'ground truth,' making sure you're drawing from your direct observation and not your imagination or preconceived notion of how you think it should look, or from your brain's symbol for a leaf.
9. Continue to make corrections, remembering that no mark is sacred. Work all areas equally, not committing to any one line or finishing any one area before the others.
10. Add the veins of the leaf. Notice how the leaf stem and veins taper toward the tip, like a tree getting narrower the farther it is from the ground. Their overall shape may even mimic the shape of an entire tree. Now give some width to the line that represented the stem.
11. Show the leaf's imperfections — like anything in nature, each leaf is different and still beautiful. Showing torn edges, insect holes or discolorations will give personality and individuality to your sketch.
12. Look over your sketch and leaf once more, firming up your best lines and lightly erasing the others.

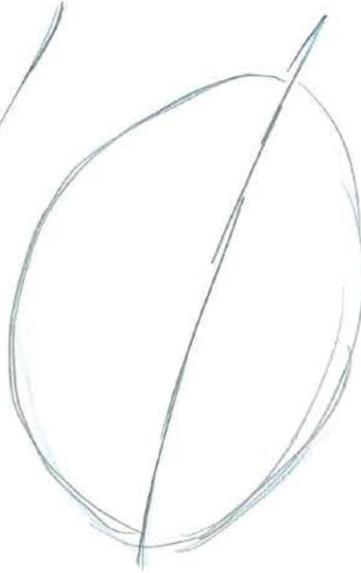
Congratulations! You just drew a leaf!

Six Steps to Drawing a Leaf

1. Draw line for the stem and midrib



2. Draw circle for the outline



3. Draw main veins



4. Draw main lobes



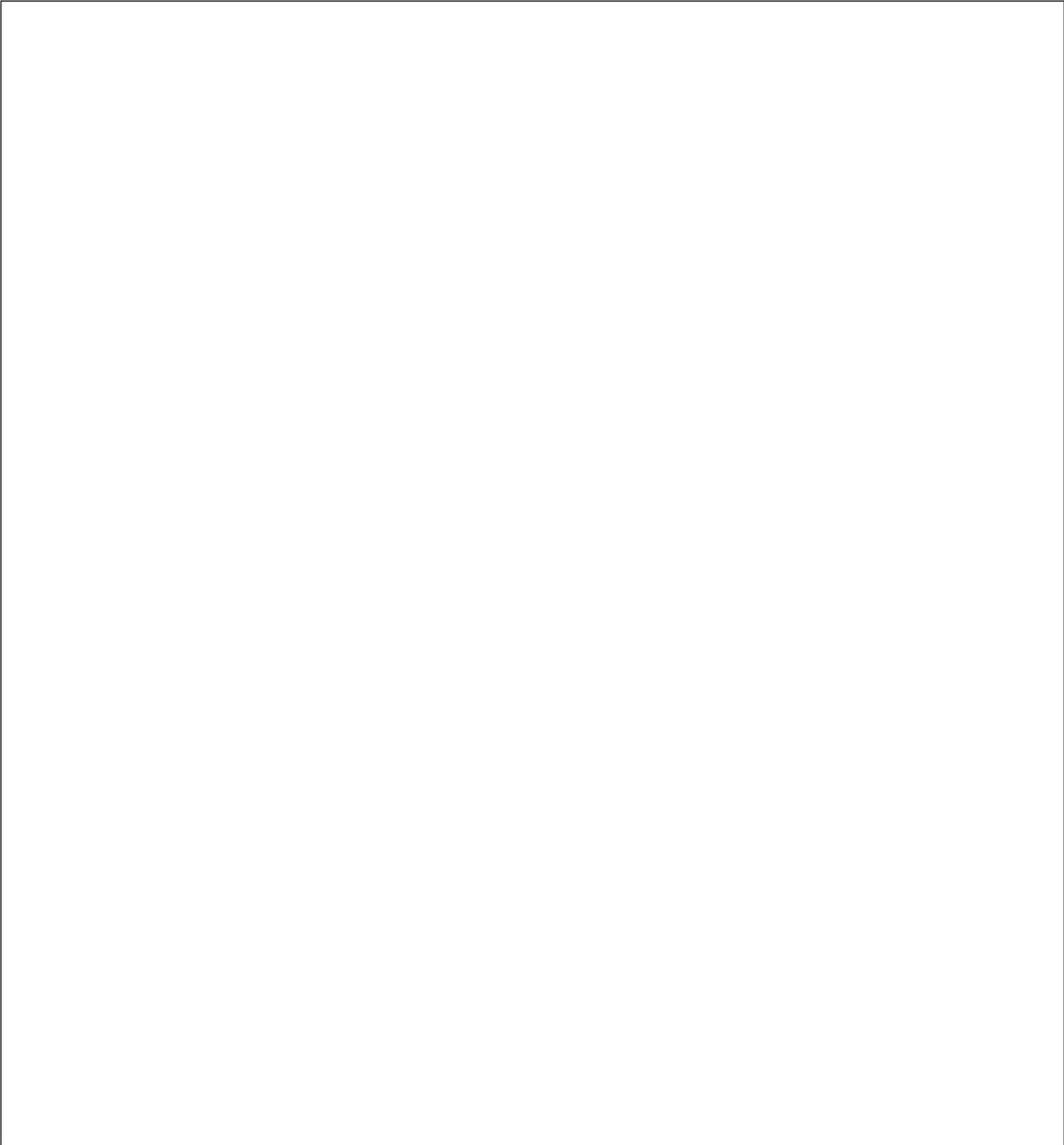
5. Make lobes more accurate



6. Firm up edges, add details, and erase preliminary sketch



Additional Practice - collect more leaves or practice using the photographs on the next page. For now, just focus on their general shape or silhouette.



Practice Drawing These Varied Shapes



Find more sketching tutorials at www.ChristineElder.com