

Believe in Tomorrow: Plant an Oak

Did you know that the oak is our national tree? In a poll conducted by the Arbor Day Foundation, the oak got the top vote from U.S. citizens, and in 2004, the oak was designated by Congress as our national tree. The Charter Oak in Hartford, Connecticut, was a symbol of the American Revolution. The mighty oak signifies strength and endurance. Oak: the people's choice.

Why Plant an Oak?

- Add beauty and structure to your landscape
- Easy care
- Provide shade, reducing your energy bill
- Leave a lasting legacy—oaks can live up to 900 years
- Provide food for birds and squirrels—fun to watch!
- Support butterfly caterpillars

Oaks in Michigan

In recent years we have lost millions of beautiful native ash trees to the invasive emerald ash borer. From the 1940s to the 1980s, the invasive Dutch elm disease wiped out millions of American elm trees. Oaks are a natural choice to replace these lost native trees, with a delightful variety of species from which to choose. In southern lower Michigan, recommended species include:

White Oaks: The leaves of white oaks have rounded lobes. The acorns develop in one season and are sweeter (less bitter) than other acorns. White oaks are somewhat resistant to oak wilt*.

- White Oak (*Quercus alba*)
- Swamp White Oak (*Quercus bicolor*)
- Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*)
- Chinquapin Oak (*Quercus muehlenbergii*)

Red Oaks: The leaves of red oaks have pointed lobes, often with a bristle at the tip. The acorns usually take two growing seasons to mature and have a bitter taste. Red oaks are susceptible to oak wilt*.

- Shingle Oak (*Quercus imbricaria*)
- Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*)
- Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)
- Black Oak (*Quercus velutina*)

Cultural Considerations

- A site with full sun is best.
- Oaks with a trunk 2-3" in diameter or smaller will transplant most easily.
- Water deeply the first year to help roots establish.
- Mulch around the base of the tree with wood chips or other organic mulch, but keep mulch from touching the bark.
- Fence against deer when the tree is young.
- *Never prune oaks between April 15 and July 15 to prevent them from contracting oak wilt. Picnic beetles that are attracted to bark wounds spread this fungal disease during these months.

Which Oak is Right for You?

White Oaks

White Oak (*Quercus alba*). Mature height: 70-90'. Wide-spreading canopy. You need room for this one. Outstanding shade tree. Tolerates a variety of conditions, but does not like wet sites or soil compaction. Red-purple fall leaf color, changing to brown. Holds leaves until spring.
Fun fact: wood is used to make whiskey barrels.

Swamp White Oak (*Quercus bicolor*). Mature height: 50-80'. Grows rapidly. Tolerates wet sites.
Fun fact: chosen for the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center Memorial due to its durability and crimson fall leaf color.

Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*). Mature height: 60-85'. Tolerates a variety of site conditions. Good for urban settings. Thick, corky bark and deep taproot make it fire and drought resistant. Very large leaves have chartreuse to yellow brown fall leaf color.
Fun fact: has the largest acorns.

Chinquapin Oak (*Quercus muehlenbergii*). Mature height: 50-80'. Tolerates a variety of site conditions. Leaves are shaped like those of the American chestnut. Yellow fall leaf color.
Fun fact: known for its delicious acorns.

Red Oaks

Shingle Oak (*Quercus imbricaria*). Mature height: 40-70'. Average to dry soil. Leaves have an oval shape with pointed ends rather than being lobed. The leaves turn dark red in autumn.
Fun fact: the wood has been used to make shingles.

Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*). Mature height: 40-65'. A bottomland species, it tolerates poor draining clay soils. Transplants easily and is relatively fast growing. High pH soils will cause yellowing of the leaves, however.
Fun fact: twig galls that form on the branches are used in the manufacture of black ink.

Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*). Mature height: 65-90'. Average soil. Tolerates most sites, including urban areas. Withstands pollutants. Fast growing. Russet red fall leaf color.
Fun fact: red oak wood is too porous to make watertight barrels.

Black Oak (*Quercus velutina*). Mature height: 60-80'. Any well-drained soil. Fall leaf color deep yellow to red.
Fun fact: the inner bark contains a yellow pigment called quercitron, which was a popular dye until the 1940s.

Plant an Oak!

As a group, oaks support more butterfly and moth caterpillars than any other tree species. These caterpillars then provide an important food source for birds to feed their developing young. The acorns feed many other types of wildlife. Oaks are long-lived, hardy and beautiful. If you only have room for one tree, plant an oak!