

Our New Jersey State Tree: Northern Red Oak

The Northern Red Oak, *Quercus rubra*, was officially authorized by a resolution on June 13, 1950 to be the official state tree. This stately Oak was chosen as “it is a representative tree of New Jersey with beauty of structure, strength, dignity, and long life, that is most useful commercially and enjoys great freedom from disease, that it is adapted to our New Jersey soils and is compatible with all native shrubs and evergreens, permitting lawn and grass areas to be successfully grown under its canopy, and that the fall color of its foliage places it foremost in our natural landscape scene.”



The foliage emerges a fuzzy reddish-pink in May and turns light green before darkening to deep green as the summer progresses. In autumn the leaves turn a deep red just before dropping in November. Its leaves are 4-8 inches long with 7-11 deeply cut lobes and pointy tips. Mature acorns are brown, $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches long with saucer-like caps. The acorns, found individually or in pairs, take two years to mature.

Red Oaks are native to the northeastern part of the United States. However, it is hardy from the Upper Great Lakes and lower Canada Upper Great Lakes and lower Canadian slopes down to Georgia. It can withstand temperatures as low as minus 30 degrees. This hardy oak has been known to live as long as 300 years. It can grow in a variety of soils but thrives in acidic soils. This hardy oak has been known to live as long as 300 years. moderate to fast growing tree reaching heights of 60-75 feet and growing as fast as 2-3 feet per year.



An important tree to our lumber industry Red Oak can be found in furniture, flooring and millwork. Even more important is the Northern Red Oak's value to our wildlife. As with all oaks, this tree supports hundreds of insects. Look underneath the foliage or within its bark and you will find caterpillars thriving. One can also find such insects as Walkingsticks, Katydid, wasps and beetles. As a result, birds such as chickadees, wrens, woodpeckers, flickers, owls and bluebirds flock to these trees for food as well as nesting sites. The acorns feed a variety of large and small animals from mice to black bear. These trees support a whole host of wildlife all year long.

With its “beauty of structure, strength, dignity and long life” the Northern Red Oak is a tree that deserves a place of honor on one's property.

by Sandy Phelps '02