

Red Oak

Quercus rubra

Gray Oak

Northern Red Oak is a highly adaptable, widely planted tree with rapid growth rate. Open grown trees have a rounded crown up to 60 feet; in forest conditions, it will grow taller, up to 90 feet. It is widely used as a landscape shade tree where overhead space is not limited. Acorns are fairly small. The foliage turns a wonderful dark red in the fall. Northern Red Oak is an important source of hardwood lumber. The wood is close grained, heavy, and hard, it machines well and accepts a variety of finishes. It is used for furniture, flooring, cabinets, paneling, and railroad ties. It provides excellent cover and nesting sites for wildlife, including for cavity nesters. Deer, elk, moose, and rabbits commonly browse the leaves and acorns. The acorns are also eaten by a wide variety of birds. My specimens are grown from seed of the "Cornell tree."



Identification

Leaves

Deciduous, alternate, elliptic, 4-8", wedge shaped at base and lobed. Broader in middle of leaf. 7-9 toothed lobes. Dull green above and paler below.



Bark/Wood

Mature bark is thick, gray, and broken by shallow fissures into regular, smooth faced plates. Wood is light reddish-brown, grained, hard, and strong.



Flower/Fruit

Monoecious; flowers coincident with leaves in spring. Inconspicuous. Acorns 3/4 to 1 1/4" with blunt tip and flat base. Only the base encased in cup.



Form

Symmetrical, dense, and round canopy with a regular and smooth outline. Individuals have more or less identical crowns. Fast growing.



Uses

Northern Red Oak is an important source of hardwood lumber used in furniture, flooring, paneling, and railroad ties. Also an important wildlife tree. Tolerant of urban soils and degraded sites, it is used to rehabilitate or enhance these sites.

Ethnobotany

The acorns were an important food source for Native Americans. To remove bitter tannins, they were boiled or soaked for days in water. Bark used as a medicine for heart troubles, bronchial infections, astringent, disinfectant, and cleanser.

Native Distribution

Widely distributed from Nova Scotia west to Minnesota, south nearly to Gulf.

Establishment

Early establishment limited by predation, fire, and shade.

Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size

USDA Zone

Light Requirements

5-8
Part to Full Sun

Soils

Drought Tolerant?

Inundation Tolerant?

Diverse

Yes

Moderate

Diseases

Few serious problems. Anthracnose can be a problem in wet climates. Oak wilt has caused death within Black and Red Oaks. Powdery mildew can be an issue in high humidity.

Similar Species

Propagation

Seed - cold stratify for 90 days.

Source(s)

Seed collected from Cornell Plantation, NY, and others.