



"NH Big Tree of the Month – October 2006" **Red Oak – *Querus rubrum***

*By Anne Krantz, NH Big Tree Team
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Amazing! These famous lines were written for a New Hampshire schoolboy:

You'd scarce expect one of my age
To speak in public on the stage;
And if by chance to fall below
Demosthenes or Cicero,
Don't view me with critic's eye,
But pass my imperfections by,
Large streams from little fountains flow,
Tall oaks from little acorns grow.

*Lines written for a school declamation for Ephraim H. Farrar, aged seven, New Ipswich,
New Hampshire (1791) by David Everett (1770-1813)*

The backbone of the New England forest, Northern red oak, grows in the final succession Northern temperate forests along with hickories, other oak species, maple and beech. The fastest growing of the oaks, it has a strong lateral root system that anchors it to the New England rocky soils, and a high lofty canopy that grows to 60-90 feet. A pasture red oak will develop a wide crown with thick horizontal branches, while the forest red oak will be tall with a tuft of canopy at the top of a straight trunk.

It can live for 200 to 300 years. This majestic tree gets its name from its rich red fall foliage with leaves that hang on through November. In winter the lateral plates of the bark are more noticeable and an identification clue because often there is a red cast in the furrows between the plates. The leathery leaves of all red oaks including scarlet, black, pin, have sharply pointed lobes with burs at the tips.

Oak trees produce many variations of the standard leaf design on one tree; the top leaves are more deeply cut (have deeper sinuses) allowing sunlight to penetrate to the layers of foliage below. The leaves on the bottom, called sun leaves, can grow in distorted fat shapes to capture more sunlight.

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The red oak acorns are the standard for acorn shape, with a nicely proportioned cup with a flat cap. They require two years to form on the tree, and when they drop, they must go through a dormant cold period of several months in the winter before they sprout.

Red oak acorns are loaded with tannins, or tannic acid of six to 10 percent, (white oak acorns are less than two percent tannin) and are bitter even for squirrels. They hoard them rather than eating them right away, inadvertently planting them to sprout in the spring. But the acorns are loaded with energy: 18 to 25 percent fat, while white oak acorns have only five to 10 percent fat.

The dormancy requirement ensures the acorns won't sprout prematurely during a January thaw. The acorns are produced in cycles with a huge crop followed by three to four years of minimal production. This is a survival technique that reduces the acorn weevil population because the weevils die out in the low production years.

The red oak lumber is strong, hard, and valued for everything from furniture to flooring. It makes excellent firewood.

The Big Tree list for New Hampshire has many huge red oaks found throughout the state with colossal fat trunks of six to seven feet in diameter; they are among the biggest trees listed.

The NH Big Tree committee is always looking for the biggest tree of each species in hopes of finding a National Champion. If you come across a massive oak or any other tree species, contact the NH Big Tree State Coordinator, Carolyn Page, carolyn_page@hotmail.com, 664-2934, who will pass the information on to the appropriate county coordinator.

Also visit the NH Big Tree web site at: www.nhbigtrees.org for the complete list champion Big Trees. The UNH Cooperative Extension and the NH Division of Forests and Lands sponsor the NH Big Tree program in cooperation with the National Register of Big Trees through American Forests.

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