



# Branching Out

*No shade tree? Blame not the sun but yourself.  
Ancient Chinese Proverb*

## How to Sprout an Acorn

**T**he Oak is a common sight throughout much of New Brunswick. In summer, it's thick, spreading canopy provides a welcome refuge from the summer sun. In autumn, we are treated to a spectacular display of fall color, as the leaves turn from deep green to bright red and gold hues. Also, anyone who has walked under an oak tree in autumn knows that it is not only dropping leaves, but acorns as well. These acorns, with a little preparation, can be planted in the fall for a healthy crop of young oak trees by spring.

### 1. Collecting the acorns

Simply gather them off the ground near any oak tree. If you are lucky, the squirrels and chipmunks will have left a few and gathering shouldn't take long. Be sure to collect acorns that are green to light brown and leave the damaged ones.



### 2. Culling the acorns

Since acorns lying on the ground rapidly dry out and become infertile, you'll need to cull these from the fertile ones most likely to survive and sprout into seedlings. Dump your sack of acorns into a pail of water. The acorns which float probably won't sprout the

ones which sink are more likely to survive.

### 3. Prepare transplants bed

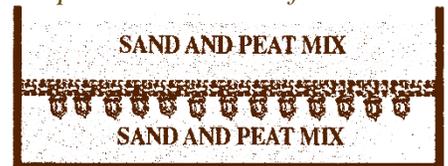
The acorns can be overwintered outside in boxes with 10-inch high wooden sides. Planks or logs can be used and the size tailored to the number of seedlings and the available space, 4' x4' is a good starting size. If you use logs, mow or till up the grass underneath. Mix equal parts sand and peat moss. Place 3 inches of the mixture in the box, then a layer of acorns. The acorns need no space between them since this is a transplant bed and the oak seedlings will be transplanted the following spring. If you wish to leave the oaks in this location for 2-3 years space the acorns at least 3 to 6 inches apart. In both cases cover with cardboard or burlap and top

with another layer of the sand and peat moss mix.

### 4. Storing the acorns

If you are unable to plant the acorns right away, they will require moist storage. Moisten peat moss in a bucket (moist, not wet, is the key). Add some acorns to the peat moss, and then transfer the mixture to a perforated plastic bag (apple bags work well). Close the open end with a twist tie and store in a dark, cold place or refrigerate. The acorns will start to sprout in March or April. They can then be removed from the fridge and planted. This is an ideal method for a school project.

*Proper construction of a seed bed.*



Now all you have to do is wait for spring. Once the ground is thawed and the frost is past, remove the layer of burlap or cardboard which covered the seeds. You should have several sprouting acorns. These can be planted into nursery beds, containers, and, if necessary, left in the bed until the following spring. Remember, however, that the seedlings are a target for squirrels and should be protected by chicken wire.

# The Red Oak

## A Tree With a Past

By Geoffrey Ritchie

**S**ince early times oaks have been identified as symbol of peace, protection and stability. The Greeks dedicated the oak to Zeus, and the Romans to Jupiter. Nordic people called the oak the Tree of Life; and to the Chinese, it was a symbol of masculine strength.

The oak has always been prominent in mythology, especially in its role as the celestial Tree of the Celtic Druids. Many druid rites and ceremonies, marriage among them, were performed beneath the boughs of the oak. The traditional Yule log of Christmas also derives from Scandinavian legend, and the expression “knock on wood” derives from the practice of asking the spirit of the oak for protection.

### Red Oak



### Natural history

Oak trees are easily distinguishable from other trees through their leaves. New Brunswick’s two native oak trees belong to separate oak groups. The red oak, *Quercus rubra*, is part of the black oak group, which has bristle-tipped leaf lobes or teeth. The bur oak, *Quercus macrocarpa*, belongs to the white oak group whose leaves tend to be rounded at the end of the leaves.

The red oak, a member of the Beech family, is considered a fast-growing, medium-sized tree. It grows 60 to 90 feet high and is one to three feet in diameter. In the Fall, acorns from the tree (which are its seed) are an extremely popular food for wildlife. Whitetail deer, black bear, raccoons, squirrels, blue jays and small rodents all eat acorns. In winter, deer browse on the buds and twigs.



### Wood

The wood of the red oak is strong, hard, fairly durable, and light reddish-brown in colour. It does not quite measure up to the wood of the Bur oak, which tends to be finer textured, extremely durable, and resistant to decay. Red oak timber is widely used for flooring, furniture, veneers, and interior finishing. The tree also makes good fuelwood.

### Other Uses

With its dark bark and contrasting reddish-rust fall colour, the red oak is an attractive ornamental that is often planted as a shade tree along city streets and parks. It is also one of the best oaks to plant along the seacoast because it is resistant to salt spray.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, people used the wood to make charcoal and barrels for shipping dry goods. The bark was stripped and chopped into fine pieces so that tannin and yellow dye could be made.

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### Bur Oak

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