

School-to-Nature



American Beech Tree

The American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) is a tall, stately tree with very smooth grey bark and a graceful arching crown. Its dark green, shiny leaves, tapered at both ends, turn golden in the fall and cling to its branches throughout the winter. Tabor Woods and Short Road Trailhead, where it can be found, are at the western edge of its range in North America. Beech trees grow about 115 feet high and can grow to 5 feet in diameter, a giant of old growth forests.



The trees produce male and female flowers in spring (photo at left), and the flowers are wind-pollinated. Beechnuts produced by the trees (photo at right) are a food source for squirrels, turkeys, porcupines, deer, and grouse. Beech trees can provide homes for cavity dwellers like owls, raccoons, squirrels, and some species of nesting birds.



Sometimes in the past persons would mark the bark of the Beech tree because it was smooth; but tree bark is like our skin; when it is cut it can get an infection that can kill the tree. Never carve initials in ANY tree bark, especially on a Beech tree.

The presence of Beech trees in our part of Wisconsin helped the CC to obtain a Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program grant through the DNR, in order to purchase the McCalvy Tabor Woods, to protect the Beeches and two other species. That stretch of woodland has the largest stand of Beeches in our area; they are a treasure.



Where Beech wood is still plentiful, the wood is used in brewing beer, and for smoking ham, sausage, and cheeses. Beech wood has also been used to build drums and rifle stocks, and even its pulp cellulose has been used in making synthetic fabric called modal. The bark of beech trees was used historically in Germany as writing paper. Beechnuts can be pressed for oil; and the nuts are edible, used in salads. Beech leaves can be steeped in gin to make a liqueur called Beechwood Noyau.

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