

School-to-Nature



Black Walnut Tree

Black Walnut trees have skyrocketed in numbers in Wisconsin over the past thirty years. Most are found in the southern part of the state, with roughly 60% in the southwest area of Wisconsin. On Conservancy lands, look for Black Walnut trees at Tabor Woods. Black Walnut trees are mature enough to produce some nuts at only 5 years old, and are fully productive at 10 years of age.

The flowers of this tree ripen into nuts in the autumn, and the greenish, golf ball-sized nut pods fall to the ground in October. Inside the pod is a very sturdy nut shell which is hard to crack, and the delicious Walnut that we eat is found inside this tough shell. The nuts are used to make ice cream, and bakery goods such as cakes, cookies, fudge and pies. The nuts are high in protein and unsaturated fat. The tree's sap can be tapped in the spring (as with maples) and made into syrup or sugar.



The hard Walnut shell is used in abrasive cleaning products, cosmetics, oil well drilling, and water filtration. The dye from the shell is used to make dark inks and stains used on cars, sidewalks, porches and patios, and was even used as a hair dye in early times. Walnut oil can be pressed from the seeds to use in cooking. Walnut wood is prized for its beautiful-looking grain and is used to make furniture, flooring, coffins, rifle stocks and many other wooden items.

A Black Walnut tree can be identified in the woods by its great height (tallest in the area); and by its long leaf fronds and seed pods (see the top photo); and by the bark, which has diamond shapes in it from a distance (see the photo above); and finally, by the presence of last year's pods and seed shells around the base of the tree, left by squirrels and other animals.

Root of the Black Walnut tree are toxic to some animals, especially horses. If you have Black Walnut trees on your property, be aware of this.

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