

School-to-Nature



Burr Oak Tree

(also called Bur Oak or Mossycup White Oak Tree)

Burr Oak trees are native to North America and can be seen on Conservancy properties as well as along Caledonia roadways. The leaves of White Oak trees are rounded at the tips; Red Oaks have pointed leaves. The Burr Oak tree is very slow growing, but lives 200-300 years, and is mostly disease- and pest-free. It can grow up to 100 feet tall and can have a trunk 10 feet wide. If you see a huge, strong-looking tree it is most likely an Oak.

Burr Oak trees have fuzzy green flowers in the spring called *catkins*, and from these come the very large acorns, 1-2 inches long. These trees have extra heavy acorn crops some years, as a survival strategy, since so many animals feed on the acorns, including bears, deer, and squirrels. Deer and porcupines eat the leaves, twigs, and bark, and a specific caterpillar depends upon these leaves. Birds and squirrels find nesting sites in oak trees.

When these oak trees are mature, they prefer to grow in the open, and their dense circle of shade usually assures this. They are drought resistant because of the long central tap root. One a one-year-old oak sapling this root can be almost 5 feet long!

Trees older than 12 years are already fire-tolerant because of their very thick bark. Since Oaks are native to the savannah and prairie areas of southern Wisconsin, prairie fires of the past would leave the oaks standing. Oaks that are too crowded together have weaker trunks and can be snapped off by high winds.

Oak wood is prized for making strong furniture and cabinets, and oak firewood burns very well in fireplaces. If you see a cut oak trunk, look at the rings; the lighter ones were made in spring and early summer, and the darker ones on late summer and fall.

BH / DL