

2012 December Plant of the Month



Northern Red Oak (*Quercus rubra* L.)

The calendar year 2012 is winding down, the holidays are approaching, and the New Year will be upon us in no time. This provides a few hectic moments to ponder the past year. This short time does allow us to observe some of the more common species around us that are often taken for granted. The December Plant of the Month, Northern Red Oak, fits that description. Red oak is New Jersey's state tree and FNJP use's the leaf as a nomenclature form logo (see Flora of New Jersey approved genera and families).

Red oak can be a massive tree. Its large trunk and canopy is found throughout the Valley & Ridge, Highlands, Piedmont and Inner Coastal Plain. It has a sparse representative on the Outer Coastal Plain, primarily on its western fringes. Where it is found it can be a co-dominant in what we today call mature or climax forests. The representatives are few and are actually fragments of the once widespread woodland type. Together with American beech and white oak, the red oak defines the canopies of richer loam soils. The longevity provides opportunities for many dependents, mammals, birds, reptiles and other organisms. Squirrels dependent on fall acorns, larger mammals (raccoon, opossum, gray fox, and flying squirrel) are snag dependent; many species will be "at home" in these old and regal trees.

Red oak is identified by a bristle tipped, shallow sinus, smooth leaf; bark dark and deeply furrowed with characteristic parallel furrows on upper bark; acorns larger, broader than tall, cap saucer-shaped. This tree is easily identified by its bark during the winter. Be sure to study the winter features of this statewide, common tree and see why it was selected to be the State Tree of New Jersey.