

Kentucky Champion Tree Program

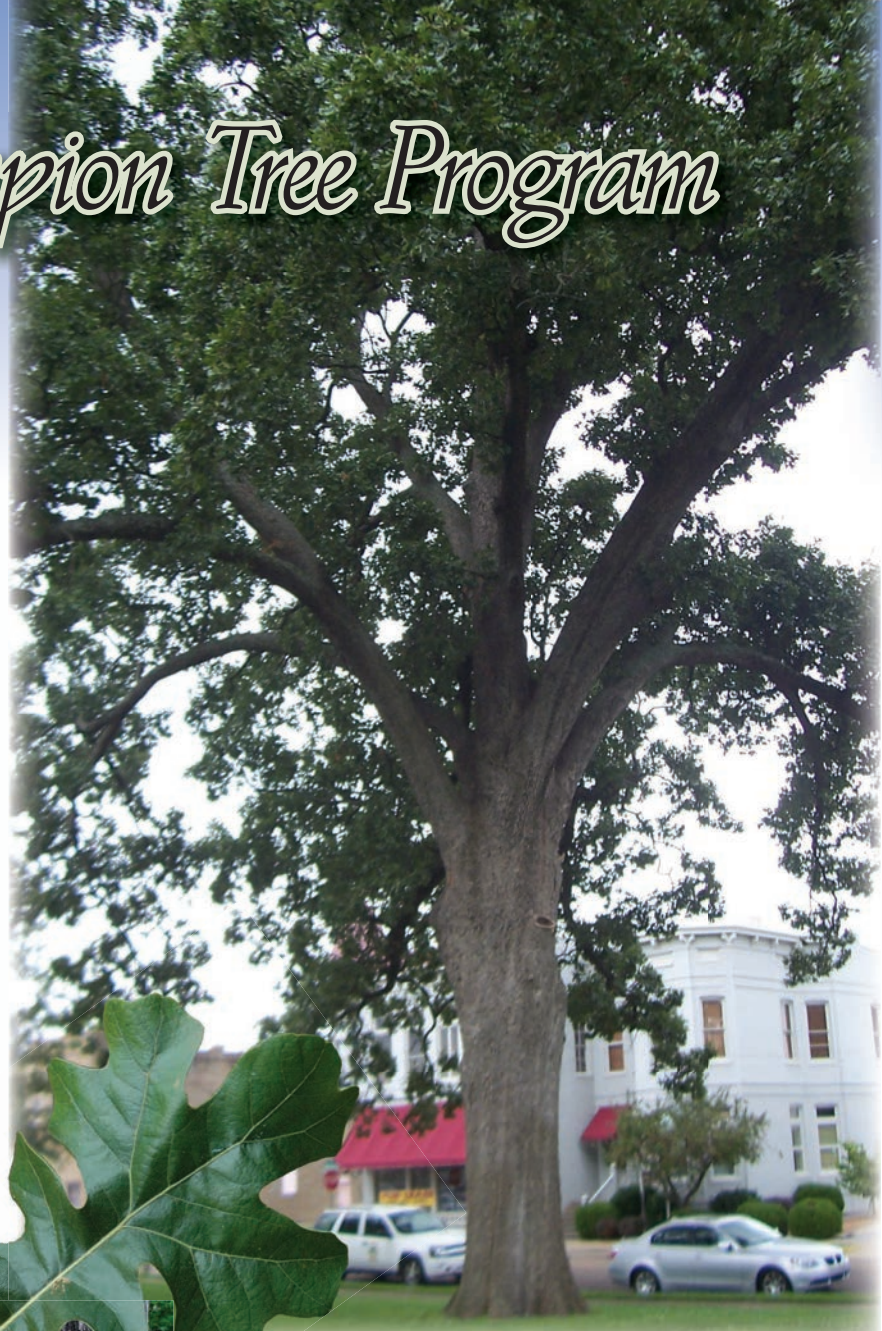
McCracken County's Giant Sentry

by Diana Olszowy

Chances are you've noticed that one consistent characteristic is shared by all champions featured in this magazine, and that is they are growing in their ideal growing conditions. Most folks would envision that to be in a deep, rich soil near a stream on a north-facing slope, but this is not necessarily the case. Our featured champ for this issue actually prefers dry, upland sites with shallow, coarse-textured soils that are deficient in nutrients and organic matter. Many urban soils can also be included into this site characteristic, which is where you'll find our State Champion post oak. This champ measures over 175 inches in circumference, (that's over 14½ feet around), stands 95 feet tall, and proudly watches over the McCracken County Courthouse.

Post oak is widespread in the Eastern and Central United States, from southeastern Massachusetts and New York, south to central Florida, and west to Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Its wood is durable and resistant to decay, and the tree gets its common name from its use in making posts, railroad ties, flooring, etc. It is often found with chestnut oak, blackjack oak, eastern redcedar and several varieties of pines. It is intolerant of shade and competition, is resistant to drought, but not to flooding, which makes it a good tree for soil stabilization projects and for urban landscapes.

Native Americans produced infusions of the astringent bark to treat a variety of ailments from chapped skin and sores to dysentery. Post oak begins acorn production at about 25 years of age, and good crops occur at two- to three-year intervals. The acorns are eaten by many species of wildlife, including squirrels, deer, and turkey, but are toxic to sheep, cattle, and goats due to the high tannin concentration. Post oak is a member of the white oak family, which means the acorns germinate in autumn soon



Above photo courtesy: Kentucky Division of Forestry

Post oak is a close relative of white oak, but rarely does its wood have the same quality of its cousin. The bark of post oak is similar to white oak, but will often have a rougher appearance and more defects. Post oak leaves will typically have a cross shape as compared to white oak. The acorns (upper left) are consumed by many species of wildlife, but can pose toxicity issues to livestock.

Leaf photo courtesy: Chris Evans, Illinois Wildlife Action Plan, Bugwood.org

Bark photo courtesy: Vern Wilkins, Indiana University, Bugwood.org

Acorns photo courtesy: Franklin Bonner, USFS (ret.), Bugwood.org

after falling. The leaves display lobes that are longest toward the front of the leaf, giving it a top-heavy look – often referred to as looking like a “cross.”

Post oak is a resilient species that is able to grow in tough sites, and our State Champion post oak is no exception.



About the Author:

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