

# Kentucky Champion Tree Program: A Powell County Treasure – Shumard Oak



Photos courtesy: Diana Olszowy

The state and national champion Shumard oak is located in Powell County, KY.



The leaves of Shumard oak are similar to other red oaks as they have bristle tips (left). Shumard oak acorns are an important food source for wildlife (above).

by Diana Olszowy

For the last ten years, each issue of this magazine has featured one of Kentucky's largest and most treasured residents – its champion trees. Kentucky's Champion Tree Program recognizes the largest specimens of over 100 native tree species, and the list continually changes as new giants are discovered or old friends fall. While keeping up this tradition, this issue will highlight our state and national champion Shumard oak, which resides in Powell County. Shumard oaks are considered the largest of the red oaks, with this champ definitely keeping up that reputation at 24 feet, 2 inches in circumference (that's 290 inches around) and 110 feet tall! Shumard oaks are native to the Atlantic coastal plain, primarily from North Carolina to Florida and west to central Texas, along the Mississippi River Valley and into the Ohio River Valley, and as far north as Michigan, New York, and into Ontario, Canada.

Shumard oaks are considered a bottomland species and are able to survive in soils with low oxygen content due to flooding or in an urban landscape where soils are compacted. They are an excellent shade tree, often used in lawns, parks, along streets and have earned a place of honor amongst arborists looking for large, tough trees that fend well for themselves. They thrive under both acidic and alkaline conditions and never show the iron defi-

ciency so common in other urban-planted oaks when the pH is above 6.8. Because of this tolerance for alkaline conditions and its ability to withstand drought, it is a widely recommended tree to plant in Kentucky. The leaves remain green long into the fall and then turn a deep orange-red. Acorn production begins at 25 years of age, but like other red oak varieties the acorns take up to two years to fully mature. The acorns provide food for various songbirds, game birds such as turkey, quail, waterfowl, white-tail deer, wild hogs and various rodents such as squirrels. The acorns are bitter, but edible if the tannins are leached out. They can be ground and used as flour, roasted and ground to make coffee, and eaten whole. The wood of Shumard oak is close-grained, hard, strong, and heavy. It is generally marketed with other red oak lumber for flooring, furniture, interior trim and veneer, cabinetry, and lumber.

Shumard oaks are a strong, long-lived species with the potential to live several hundred years and hopefully this stately and majestic champion will continue to produce future champs because "this mighty oak was once just a little nut that stood its ground, too."

**About the Author:**

Diana Olszowy is the former Stewardship Branch Manager with the Kentucky Division of Forestry. She also served as an editor of the Kentucky Woodlands Magazine since its inception in 2006.