

Kentucky Champion Tree Program

Moore's Magnificent Walnut

by Diana Olszowy

Many years ago, Green County residents Sam and Mimi Moore discovered a very large black walnut tree on their property. Unbeknownst to them at the time, their walnut was the largest in the state and by 2007 it was officially recognized as Kentucky's state champion black walnut.

To give you an idea of how impressive this tree is, black walnuts normally average from 6 to 8 feet in circumference. This champ is over 205 inches in circumference (that's over 17 feet around) and is 90 feet tall. It is quite happy with its current growing conditions—full sun and moist, rich, well-drained soil, which happens to be the ideal site conditions for walnuts. Their natural range extends from Vermont and Massachusetts, west through Ontario to South Dakota and south to Texas and east to Florida.

They are relatively fast-growing trees and, unlike most hardwoods, develop and maintain a taproot that can grow deep depending upon root competition from other species. And in an attempt to give themselves an edge, their roots contain a toxic chemical called juglone that inhibits root growth and eliminates competition from juglone-sensitive species, including tomatoes, potatoes, peas, peppers, alfalfa, chestnut, pine, apples, lilac, serviceberry and others. The black walnut's poison does not work on all plant species and some even thrive on it (bush honeysuckle).

Walnut is an easy tree species to identify during all seasons—dark brownish-gray deeply furrowed bark with a diamondback pattern; long compound leaves with 11 to 23 leaflets that have a pungent smell when rubbed or bruised; stout twigs with a prominent terminal bud and leaf scars that resemble monkey faces. Walnuts produce a large edible nut that is covered with a thick green outer husk that will ripen to a yellow-black color. Good seed crops occur irregularly, perhaps twice in five years. Walnuts were referred to as “our best friends” in times of war and peace. Native Americans and early settlers used it for food, dyes ink, medicine, fence posts, gunstocks and

Photo courtesy: Kentucky Division of Forestry



Photo courtesy left: Jason Sharman, Vitalitree, Bugwood.org



Black walnut is one of the easiest trees to recognize because of its distinguishing features. The dark furrowed bark, large leaves with up to 23 leaflets (above), and the highly recognizable nut in its husk (right) all aid in the identification of this important tree.



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

fine furniture. The straight-grained wood is valued for its beautiful dark chocolate-brown color and is considered to be one of the most valuable hardwoods in Kentucky, if not “the” most valuable.

The species has a few insect/disease problems such as walnut caterpillars, webworms, various borers, including the newest threat of Thousand Canker Disease. (See KWM, Volume 7, Issue 2, “New Tree Pests Threatening from the North and South” for more information). Overall, walnuts are fairly resilient trees, not particularly good for urban landscapes but definitely a species you want to encourage to grow in your woods, especially if you are a squirrel hunter.

This magnificent walnut stands as a living memorial to Sam Moore, and with the help of his wife Mimi his legacy will last for years to come.

About the Author:

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