

## Kentucky Big Tree Program

Chances are you've seen at least one of these giant trees in a city park, cemetery, or even in your own backyard. Some have been around since Daniel Boone roamed the state, while others have been around since before our country was founded. These magnificent giants capture our imagination for their size and strength; however, there's more to a champion tree than just its size. They are symbols of all the good work trees do for the quality of the environment and our quality of life. Big trees provide more cooling

# Kentucky's Quiet

By Diana L. Olszowy

# Giants

## A Look at Kentucky's Big Tree Program

*Photos courtesy Kentucky Division  
of Forestry*

*The State Champion Pecan,  
Allen County.*

shade and more places for wildlife to perch and nest. They sequester more carbon dioxide, trap more pollutants, and purify more water.

Although most trees can outlive us — a lifespan of 100 to 200 years is not unusual for trees — they succumb to age, disease and insects, wind, rain, and drought. And now, all too often, they fall victim to the onslaught of development. All trees work hard to improve our environment. It's our responsibility to maintain a healthy environment that allows trees to grow to champion status.

In 1940, the American Forests Foundation began a search for the largest species of American trees. This list, now called the National Register of Big Trees, contains the names of more than 750 species (13 of which are from Kentucky). The Kentucky Division of Forestry began compiling a list of state champions in 1968. The first list contained the names of only 51 species; the current list, which is restricted to only native or naturalized species in Kentucky, has more than 90 species reported. This list is continually updated as new giants are discovered or old friends fall. The latest list can be found on the Division of Forestry's Web page [www.forestry.ky.gov](http://www.forestry.ky.gov).

Our list of state champions is restricted to tree species listed in "Trees and Shrubs of Kentucky" by Mary Wharton and Roger Barbour, which was last revised in 1994.

## Do You Have a Champion Tree?

To nominate a tree, the species must first be identified and measured properly. Measurements must be made for circumference, height, and crown spread. If your tree identification skills are somewhat lacking, consider contacting the Division of Forestry district office nearest to you for assistance.

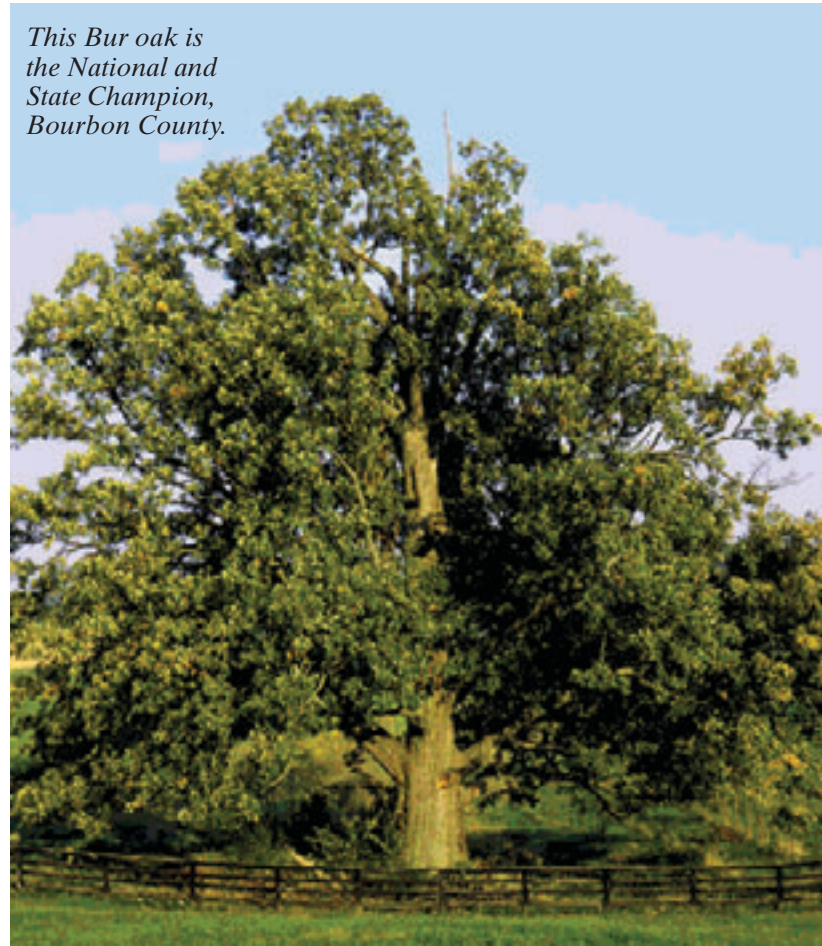
### Circumference

The tree's trunk should be measured at a point 4 1/2 feet above the ground to get a measurement called d.b.h., or diameter at breast height. If the tree forks below 4 1/2 feet, it is considered as two trees, and only one fork can be measured. If the tree forks above 4 1/2 feet, it is considered as one tree and can be measured at d.b.h.

### Height

An estimation of height can be made using a yardstick. First, measure 100 feet from the tree. Next, hold the yardstick vertically, 25 inches from the eye. Align the zero inch mark on the yardstick at the base of the tree and note the inch mark that aligns with the top of the tree. Every inch equals 4 feet.

*This Bur oak is the National and State Champion, Bourbon County.*



### Crown Spread

To determine a tree's average crown spread, you must first find the points in the tree's crown that are widest and narrowest. These points must then be marked on the ground. Walk underneath the tree and visually assess where the tree's branches extend the farthest from the trunk of the tree. Drive a stake into the ground directly beneath this point. Following a line directly through the center of the tree's base, find the opposite side of the crown's widest point, stand directly beneath the outer edge of it, and drive a second stake into the ground.

Next, you must determine the narrowest spread in the tree's crown. Find where the outer edge of the crown's branches are closest to the bole, stand directly beneath this point, and drive a stake into the ground. Do the same as before and find the opposite side of the crown, and drive a second stake to mark it. Measure the number of feet between the stakes marking the crown's widest dimension

and write it down. Measure the number of feet between the stakes marking the crown's narrowest dimension. Add the two numbers together, **divide by two**, and the result is the tree's average crown spread.

## Total Your Points

Add together the points for the tree's circumference (in inches), tree's height (in feet), and of the average crown spread (in feet). The result is your tree's total point index. Champion status is based on the number of points, and only a forester can determine whether your tree has enough points to be a champion.

**Example:** sugar maple – 120 inches in circumference + 80 feet tall + average crown spread of 60 feet.

Circumference (in inches): 120

Height (in feet): 80

Average crown spread (in feet)/4:  $60/4 = 15$

**Total Index Points:** 215

After determining the index points for your champion tree nominee, contact the district office (if you have not already done so) that serves your area and make arrangements for a forester to certify your results and submit your nomination. To check how large your tree is in comparison to other state champs or to see how many big trees are in your county, visit the Kentucky Division of Forestry's Web site: [www.forestry.ky.gov/programs/championtree](http://www.forestry.ky.gov/programs/championtree), or call 1-800-866-0555 for additional information about Kentucky's Champion Tree Program.

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