

Red Oak, *Quercus rubra*

Tree of the Month - January 2015

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The Red Oak is one of our more common and beautiful native trees in the Oak family. Although susceptible to Oak wilt, a fungal pathogen that is potentially fatal, the Red Oak species are an important part of our urban forests. I love their fall color especially. Yet they have much to commend them all through the year. They have a long history of **ethnobotany**, the scientific study of the relationship between the use of plants by



people. The Iroquois people had an interesting use of Red Oaks for healing ruptured navels. Callus bark or the rounded healing growth that appears when a tree is wounded would be scraped off the tree. This was then dried and powdered into a fine dust and then probably made into a paste and applied to the navel to assist in healing.

The Red Oaks prefer a slightly acidic soil and like all Oaks resent being moved. In other words, they do not like having their roots messed with. Construction, transplantation and soil disruption in the root zone of an oak tree can be fatal. We think of our Oaks as mighty but they can easily be done in by careless behavior in their root zone. An interesting fact

about Red Oaks is that their acorns take two years to mature. It is the provincial tree of Prince Edward Island, Canada and the State tree of New Jersey. In its long history of being utilized by humans, the reddish colored wood of the Red Oak is highly prized and often used for flooring, interior trim, furniture and veneer. Oaks are typically considered slow growing but the Red Oaks are really relatively fast in their growth habits and can become substantial members of the landscape before you know it!

The distinctive ID characteristic of the Red Oak tree is the “pointed” lobes of the leaves. Both the Red Oak and Black Oak species have this characteristic, as well as the often appreciated habit of hanging on to leaves through the winter months providing some interest in the long snowy cold of Chicago’s winters.

