

Mighty Oak Trees

There is a saying, “*Mighty oaks from little acorns grow!*” If you look at a tiny acorn, you might not see its potential to grow 100 feet tall! The saying reminds us that, like oaks, in the seeds of life there is tremendous potential... that goes for each of us.

- An acorn is a fruit of the Oak tree. ¹



- Oak trees produce about 1,000 acorns a year in general. However, there are some years they produce a higher volume in a “boom” called a “mast” year, or a much lower number in a “bust.” Scientists are not quite sure why this happens, but there are some benefits to the tree. In a boom year, the oak produces so many acorns that animals that rely on the acorns for food cannot eat them all leaving more to germinate and grow into trees. On the other hand, in a bust year, there is a limited amount of food for the animals, and this keeps their population numbers in check.² That balance ensures that in boom years, some acorns will be able to survive.

- Many animals that eat acorns live in or around Brightwood Park such as squirrels, chipmunks, mice, birds, deer, racoons, and opossums.

- An acorn can take weeks to germinate into a plant. Many of the acorns that fall to the ground get eaten before they get a chance to sprout.



- If an acorn manages to grow into a sapling, it can take 20 years before it can produce acorns of its own.

- When an acorn does survive to grow into a tree, it can live hundreds of years and grow 100 feet tall.



- Oak trees can be deciduous or evergreen. Deciduous Oak leaves look like this:

¹ Photos of leaves, acorn, and germinating acorn are from: <https://www.factsjustforkids.com/plant-facts/tree-facts-for-kids/oak-tree-facts/>

² Check out the NY Botanical garden website for more information: <https://libanswers.nybg.org/faq/222824>

- Oak trees are marcescent. That means that their leaves don't fall off in autumn. In the winter, you can see brown papery leaves still clinging to branches.
- This photo from a tree in Brightwood Park shows what Oak tree bark looks like on a very old tree.
- Oak trees can live hundreds of years.
- Oak trees are very important for the earth's biodiversity and ecology as they support thousands of different species that rely on them for food, habitat and shelter. From fungi (mushrooms) to insects to birds to animals, oak trees are important for their survival.



There are about 500 different species of Oak trees world-wide, but 19 species are native to New Jersey.

Because Oak trees provide food and habitat for so, so many species, they are a vital part of a healthy New Jersey ecosystem. For biodiversity and for all of us, Oaks really are "mighty."