

ANNOUNCING THE SMA URBAN TREE OF THE YEAR: CHESTNUT OAK

The 2017 SMA Urban Tree of the Year is native to much of the Eastern United States. Hikers from New York to Tennessee who ascend to dry ridges will often see the deeply furrowed, blocky barked trunks of chestnut oak (*Quercus montana*) (syn. *Q. prinus*). The bark is so distinctive, it may be the only ID feature one needs.

There's growing interest in using chestnut oak in the urban environment because it is pH-adaptable, handles dry soils and periods of drought, has a beautiful mature form, requires minimal pruning, and tends to be free of major pests and diseases.

The common name "chestnut oak" owes to the leaves looking like those of American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) and indeed both are members of the beech family, Fagaceae. Other common names for chestnut oak include rock oak, rock chestnut oak, or mountain oak—referring to its customary sighting in dry, rocky soils on ridgetops, where it has a competitive advantage. However, if chestnut oak is open-grown in the moist, well-drained soil that all trees dream about, it will be significantly bigger than its scrappy ridgetop cousins. Typically it reaches 50 to 70 feet (15 to 21 m) tall and almost as wide. It's hardy in USDA Zones 4 to 8 and prefers full sun.

Dublin, Ohio Forestry Assistant **Jocelyn Knerr** nominated the tree. "We started using chestnut oak in Dublin in 2009 as a street tree," she says. "We have planted it to replace some of our ash trees as well as using it in greenspaces throughout the city. It has adapted well to the alkaline soils of Dublin and it seems to handle the salt well. The pyramidal shape is an added plus in its young age because it allows for our snowplows and garbage trucks to pass without destroying any branches."

Frankfort, Kentucky Urban Forester **Lorri Grueber** was thrilled to learn that a native tree was named SMA Urban Tree of the Year. "Many times, especially in urban settings, we turn to non-native species and then 10-20 years down the road we regret doing so, due to their invasive qualities," she says. "With *Q. montana* we won't have those regrets." Grueber recommends giving chestnut oak ample room to spread its branches—for example, in large tree lawns, wide medians, or large parking lot beds. "You may also consider using structural soil to guide and protect the root system," she says. In terms of ornamental features, Grueber says, "Its habit provides an inviting canopy, it has glossy leaves in the summer, and it affords fabulous winter interest with the rugged bark."

Westerville, Ohio Parks and Urban Forest Manager **Matt Ulrey** is also a fan. "Chestnut oak adds to the variety of oak options for the urban setting," he says. "It has shown itself to be tolerant of the variety of harsh conditions placed on a street tree. At matu-



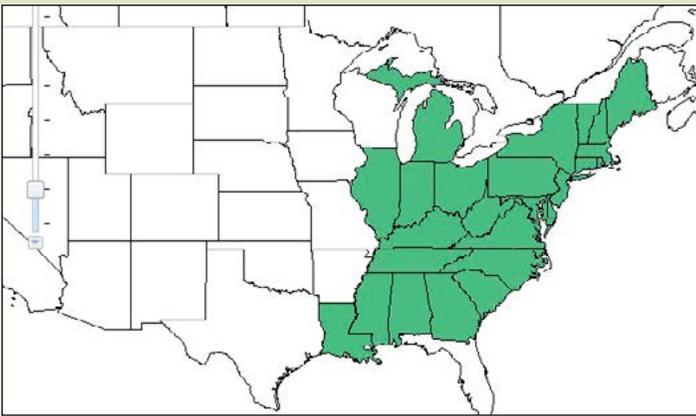
Chestnut oak acorn • Photo by Keith Kanoti, Maine Forest Service, Bugwood.org



Do the leaves remind you of those of the American chestnut?
• Photo courtesy Missouri Botanical Garden

(right) The stately habit of chestnut oak • Photo courtesy Cornell Woody Plants Database





Native range of chestnut oak • USDA Plants Database



Fall color of chestnut oak ranges from red to orange-yellow to yellow-brown. • Photo by Ethan M. Dropkin, Cornell Woody Plants Database



Chestnut oak's unmistakable bark • Photo (c) 2002 Steven J. Baskauf <http://bioimages.vanderbilt.edu/baskauf/13676.htm>

...rity, it is very stately looking with its well branched structure, and sometimes it even provides a nice red fall color; however, its fall color is most commonly a yellowish brown to orange-yellow.”

The SMA recognizes the underutilized, attractive, and extremely useful chestnut oak for its service to urban forests and encourages its use when matched appropriately to site and as part of a diverse urban tree inventory. You can see the full list of past Tree of the Year winners on the SMA website, www.urban-forestry.com. 🍂

This poem, written by SMA Bard Steve Cothrel with input from Doug Still and Michelle Sutton, was used to gradually reveal the identity of the 2017 SMA Urban Tree of the Year at the Society’s awards luncheon at the recent Indianapolis conference. It was accompanied by a champagne toast.

Chestnut Oak from A-Z

A is for announcing our Tree of the Year
B is for bubbly, with which we will cheer

C is for cambium, the meristem that grows
D is for defense, it has few pest woes

E is for excitement, this tree is a peach
F is for Fagaceae, its family a beech

G is for growth in the sun, not the shade
H is for hardiness—Zone 4, be not afraid

I is for intolerant of shade, we just said that
J is for juicy nuts making fall squirrels fat

K is for kindling, few woods will burn stronger
L is for long-lived, two centuries or longer

M is for monoecious, its flowers are both sexes
N is for native, down to Georgia but not Texas

O is for orange inner bark near the xylem
P is for photosynthesis, likes others in its phylum

Q is for *Quercus*, a genus with grace
R is for rock oak, a dry ledge is its place

S is for serration, small teeth on the leaf
T is for toasting, you’ll soon have relief

U is for unremarkable color in fall
V is for vertical, this tree can grow tall

W is for wickedly furrowed bark texture
X is for xylem—do you remember that lecture?

Y is for you, have you enjoyed our tree poem?
Z is for—damn it, there’s no Z in phloem.

At any rate, let us now toast without fear
 To the chestnut oak, our new Tree of the Year
 So whether you like *Quercus montana* or *prinus*
 Let’s all raise our glass to this tree—it’s the finest.