

# Chestnut Oak

Botanical/Latin name *Quercus Montana*



- ❖ Chestnut Oak owes its name to its leaves, 4"-6" long, looking like those of the American Chestnut.
- ❖ It is a species of oak in the white oak group native to eastern U.S. Predominantly a ridge-top tree in hardwood forests. Also called Mountain Oak or Rock Oak because it grows in dry rocky habitats, sometimes even around large rocks.
- ❖ As a consequence of its dry habitat and harsh ridge-top exposure, it is not usually large, 59'–72' tall; specimens growing in better conditions however can become large, up to 141'.
- ❖ It is a long-lived tree, with high-quality timber when well-formed. The heavy, durable, close-grained wood is used for fence posts, fuel, railroad ties and tannin.
- ❖ Saplings are easier to transplant than many other oaks because the taproot of the seedling disintegrates as the tree grows, and the remaining roots form a dense mat about three feet deep.
- ❖ It is monoecious, having pollen-bearing catkins in mid-spring that fertilize the inconspicuous female flowers on the same tree.
- ❖ It reproduces from seed as well as stump sprouts.
- ❖ The 1"-1-1/2" long acorns mature in one growing season, are among the largest of native American oaks and are a valuable wildlife food. Acorns are produced when a tree grown from seed is about 20 years of age, but sprouts from cut stumps can produce acorns in as little as three years after cutting.
- ❖ Extensive confusion between the chestnut oak (*Q. montana*) and the swamp chestnut oak (*Quercus michauxii*) has historically occurred. In the past some botanists had considered them to be the same species using the name *Quercus prinus* for both so care should be taken in research since information on *Q. prinus* has been used for both trees and is now unassignable to either. Although the leaves of these 2 trees are virtually identical, the Chestnut Oak is readily identified by its massively ridged, scaly and fissured dark gray-brown bark, resembling the back of an alligator.
- ❖ Gypsy moths view the Chestnut Oak as a preferred food sometimes defoliating the tree in midseason. This defoliation may temporarily weaken the tree but it usually recovers as long as it doesn't happen again in the same season.
- ❖ This is a tough and resilient tree. If you have a rocky, dry, well drained site where little else will grow, plant a Chestnut Oak. It has also shown itself to be tolerant of the variety of harsh conditions placed on street trees.
- ❖ **It is the Society of Municipal Arborists (SMA) tree of the year for 2017.** They state it is an under utilized tree in urban environments because it is pH-adaptable, handles dry soil, periods of drought, has a beautiful mature form, requires minimal pruning, and tends to be free of major pests and diseases. It is also native to our area so it is an excellent tree to consider planting.  
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*This Tree of the Month series is brought to you by the City of Pittsfield, RSVP and Pittsfield Tree Watch, a volunteer group that promotes tree stewardship and education in our City.*

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