

## Oaks Underused in the Landscape

Oak trees are some of the most beautiful and breathtaking trees that can be found. Many old, majestic oaks can be found throughout Clarksville, brightening the landscape with their long, sweeping branches and innate beauty. But as we are blessed with such old, large gems, there seems to be a lack of new and younger oaks in our community. I have also seen this trend in other parts of the country, and believe that this needs to be addressed. Oaks are some of the most versatile trees that we have at our disposal. They are long lived, grow relatively fast, and are adaptable to sites and soils.

Oak trees can have an extremely long life, even in the harsh conditions of the urban environment. An oak tree's usefulness can far exceed many other trees. Now this is not to say that every oak tree that you plant is going to be around for a long time. One example of an oak's potentially short lifespan is with Pin Oak/*Quercus palustris*. Pin Oak is a common oak that is used in the landscape because of its fast growth rate and nice habit. The problem with Pin Oak is that it is not adaptable to high pH soils. It is very common to see Pin Oaks start to turn yellow and then eventually die a few years down the road. This is because Pin Oak is not able to get the iron that it needs to thrive. You can also see this problem with Willow Oak/*Quercus phellos*. This problem typically occurs on these two oaks when they are planted in drier areas. Both of these trees are bottomland species, so planting them in a wetter area of the yard would be a better idea for the longevity of the trees in the landscape.

One common misconception about using oaks in the landscape is that

they are slow growing. This is true for some species, but in general, most oaks can grow relatively fast, or at least as much as comparable trees. Many oaks will grow two feet a year, some a little more or less. Oak trees have two flushes of growth per year, one in the spring and then another in the fall. It is important to keep this second flush of growth in mind when fertilizing in the fall. You do not want to fertilize too much and push the growth. The new growth needs time to harden off and get ready for winter. The message here is to not get caught up in the thinking that all oaks grow slowly. Most will grow into nice young shade trees in the same amount of time as most other trees.

I touched briefly on the adaptability of oaks, but want to look at that a little more closely here. You can find an oak tree to fit almost any site that you have. You have to now exactly what conditions you are dealing with before you pick which oak to use. There are oaks for dry, moist, and wet sites. Some people say they will not plant an oak tree because they do not have enough room on their property to plant one. Well, I have an answer for them as well. Not all oaks develop into tall, massive trees. There are many oaks to choose from that will not grow to monstrous proportions. Heck, there are even a few that get no larger than a typical shrub. One in particular is Dwarf Chinkapin Oak/*Quercus prinoides*. The 50-year-old specimens that I have seen of this species were no larger than 10 feet tall at the Morton Arboretum. This makes a great tree/shrub for the smaller property or shrub border. Also, another great benefit is that it starts to produce acorns at about three years of age, which is great for a variety of smaller wildlife.

The next time you are looking for a shade tree to plant for your home, do not overlook the oaks. They have so many great things to offer that they should be used far more extensively than they are. Oak trees develop into beautiful shade trees, and their acorns

help provide food for so many species of animals. Oaks are truly beautiful and amazing trees that continue to give back a magnitude of benefits over their long life. Here are some oaks to consider using in your landscape.

**Common Name**

Sawtooth Oak  
White Oak  
Swamp White Oak  
Scarlet Oak  
Southern Red Oak  
Overcup Oak  
Bur Oak  
Swamp Chestnut Oak  
Chinkapin Oak  
Nuttall Oak  
Dwarf Chinkapin Oak  
Chestnut Oak  
Red Oak  
Shumard Oak  
Post Oak

**Scientific Name**

*Quercus acutissima*  
*Quercus alba*  
*Quercus bicolor*  
*Quercus coccinea*  
*Quercus falcata*  
*Quercus lyrata*  
*Quercus macrocarpa*  
*Quercus michauxii*  
*Quercus muehlenbergii*  
*Quercus nuttallii*  
*Quercus prinoides*  
*Quercus prinus*  
*Quercus rubra*  
*Quercus shumardii*  
*Quercus stellata*