

Bur Oak

Quercus macrocarpa

Soil Type	Fertile, well-drained
Soil Moisture	Medium to Dry
Sun Exposure	Full Sun
Height	50'-80' (mature); 6'-10' at 20 years.
Width	50'-80' (mature)
Bloom Color	Yellow/green catkins, red-fringed green spikes
Bloom Time	Apr, May
Seed/fruit	Acorns – Sept-Dec
Fall Foliage Color	Yellow-brown
Spacing	20' minimum.

Thick trunk, gray bark, short branches, and a large, round crown. Tolerant of air pollution and resistant to disease.



Don't let the size scare you! Oaks can take more than a century to reach full size. After a couple of years of establishing its roots, it could grow two feet per year under ideal conditions, though one foot or less per year is typical. For perspective, a 12-year-old bur oak growing in silty loam was only 14 feet tall, and a 65-year-old tree grown in deep, fertile, moist loam in eastern Nebraska was only 37.5 feet tall (<https://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/tree/quemac/all.html>). Mulch around your tree with leaf litter to reduce nutrient and moisture loss to grass and weeds, and to allow insects to complete their life cycles under your tree.

Flowers appear in April or May with both male and females on the same tree, creating a large, nearly round acorn enclosed 1/2 or more by a large fringed cup. The bark of older trees is dark with deep vertical furrows. Leaves are 6-10 inches long and 4-5 inches at the widest point.

Oaks host over 300 caterpillar species that feed dozens of species of birds. Oaks are the best tree to plant to support biodiversity and population stability and growth.

Chances are you will not need to deal with acorns. Bur oaks take decades to start producing. Acorns can sprout immediately after falling from the tree, but they are usually eaten too quickly to develop into seedlings. They are susceptible to weevils as well, which are themselves a food source for wildlife. Bur Oak acorns are not recommended for human consumption due to their high levels of tannins.

(Photo from Iowa DNR Nursery: https://nursery.iowadnr.gov/Bur-Oak_p_87.html)