“They are beautiful in their peace,
They are wise in their silence.
They will stand after we are dust.
They teach us, and we tend them.”

G.A. MacDunelmor

BASIC GROWING REQUIREMENTS FOR YOUR Oak Trees

THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF MCHENRY COUNTY
“Preserving Land Forever”
The Oak forests of northern Illinois have taken centuries to develop and deserve to be regarded as an irreplaceable landscape legacy. Certain conditions provided by the forest community as a whole are vital to the life of an Oak tree. These conditions must be either preserved or successfully simulated.

**Soil**: Non-native plants, including lawns, will rob the life out of your Oaks. These plants are considered a competitive, non-cooperative ecosystem with a completely different set of requirements.

The key to planting under Oaks without killing them is to use native species that have the same water requirements (little to no summer irrigation). This means lawn grass is OUT!

- **Do** use native plants that live under the canopy of the Oak: Wild Geranium, Virginia Bluebells, Shooting Star, Nodding Wild Onion, Solomons Seal, Columbine, Trillium, Penn Sedge, Mayapples, Woodland Sunflower and Cinnamon Fern to name a few.

**Mulch**: Though store-bought mulch provides organic materials, it cannot work alone.

- **Do** let the natural Oak mulch form a thick, soft, moist mulch under the Oak. This will release nutrients back into the soil, moderate the soil temperature, and support the complex soil foodweb that is most beneficial to the tree.
- **Don’t** pile mulch next to the trunk–make a “donut” a few inches away from the trunk.
- **Do** try to mulch the entire dripline with two to four inches
**Roots:** The most active portions of the oak’s root system occupies the few inches closest to the surface. Oak roots spread wide, but not very deep, and are extremely sensitive to environmental change (soil compaction, altered soil grade, increased moisture, paving) Oaks are put under a tremendous amount of stress when construction is performed around or near their roots. Keep this area relatively undisturbed.

- **Do** protect the root zone from compaction from heavy machinery, vehicles or livestock. When it cannot be avoided, put protection down—like plywood boards.

![Diagram of root protection zone and dripline]

- **Do** make sure that your landscaping service understands the special care that the Oak’s root systems require.

**Water:** Our Oaks have evolved to live in our region—wet winters and dry summers. When water is introduced into the root zone during the warm summer months, the root pathogens living in the soil grow vigorously and attack the Oak roots fiercely, and the tree begins a long, slow decline.

- **Don’t** water mature Oaks unless there is a severe drought.
• **Do** provide regular irrigation to newly planted oaks until they are established, usually two to three years.

**Fertilizer:** The salts in many fertilizers, especially soluble nitrogen, can predispose trees to insect and other problems.

• **Don’t** apply fertilizers under Oaks unless it is a slow-release, insoluble fertilizer.

**Fungicides and Insecticides:** Trees that are stressed due to weather, construction or invasive pests sometimes require therapeutic care.

• **Do** remember that there are a lot of good fungi that Oaks require to survive.
• **Do** consult a trained professional before applying a fungicide or insecticide.

**Pruning:** Mature Oaks do not require pruning except to remove weakened, diseased or dangerous branches. If necessary, trees should be pruned in the dry season (November through March).

• **Don’t** treat the wound with any kind of sealant. Trees heal themselves perfectly well. Sealant only encourages insects and disease by trapping moisture.
• **Do** consult a certified arborist before pruning

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**In the spring, look around your yard for baby Oaks & Hickories!**

Flag these new trees so you don’t mow them.
Common Oaks/Hickories of McHenry County

- Bur Oak
  *Quercus Macrocarpa*

- White Oak
  *Quercus Alba*

- Swamp White Oak
  *Quercus Bicolor*

- Northern Red Oak
  *Quercus Rubra*

- Black Oak
  *Quercus Velutina*

- Shagbark Hickory
  *Carya Ovata*

**How Old is My Tree? (estimate)**

<table>
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<th>Diameter (Inches)</th>
<th>Bur/Swamp White Oak</th>
<th>Red Oak</th>
<th>White Oak</th>
<th>Shagbark Hickory</th>
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Help ensure that your “Mighty Oaks” will continue to be a source of beauty and enjoyment for many years to come by recognizing their basic growing requirements.

**FOR MORE TREE CARE INFORMATION:**

The Care of Trees  
847-382-4120  
www.TheCareOfTrees.com

The Davey Tree Expert Company  
847-426-8889  
www.Davey.com

**NATIVE LANDSCAPING INFORMATION:**

Citizens for Conservation  
847-382-SAVE  
www.CitizensForConservation.org

Wildflower Preservation  
& Propagation Committee  
www.theWPPC.org

McHenry County Conservation District  
815-338-6223  
www.MCCDistrict.org

**PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION INFORMATION:**

Barrington Area Conservation Trust  
847-381-4291  
www.BHCtrust.org

The Land Conservancy of McHenry County  
815-337-9502  
www.ConserveMC.org