

Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month

JUNE 2015

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE



Carolina Chickadee



Photos by Will Stuart

Quercus rubra Red oak

Red oak--food and shelter for birds

Plant a mighty red oak in your yard and you will benefit not only from the shade, but from the enhanced wildlife opportunities as well. Red oaks provide nest sites and food for birds, mammals and caterpillars. As a matter of fact, oaks as a species, host 557 different species of caterpillars, which are the main food source for baby birds.

How important is a red oak to the bird community?

Consider:

- Nuts for forage
- Nest sites in cavities of both live and dead red oaks
- Leading host plant of Lepidoptera (butterfly) species thus providing bird food



The red oak is moderately fast-growing, often reaching 90-100 ft. tall in moist, fertile sites. It can spread to 45 feet wide. Plant in an area with sun (you will get the benefit of shade later on). Acorns (3/4" -1" long) planted in the fall will germinate the following spring.

How can I get a red oak seedling?

Think like a squirrel of course! This is a good family activity, since acorns are large seeds and easy to handle. Bury several acorns soon after they fall (they rot or dry out quickly). Place on their side lightly covered with soil in either a pot or seed bed. Keep relatively moist and some should germinate in spring. If in a pot, transplant into your yard within 2 years, as oaks prefer not to be disturbed. Take the time to plant a red oak

tree instead of a non-native mimosa or Bradford pear, and your bird friends will thank you.

Did you know?

A pair of baby chickadees will eat up to 300 caterpillars a day! That's almost 4,800 in the two weeks it takes to develop. Good thing caterpillars grow on red oak trees!

Find out More!

Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month is a joint effort of the NC Native Plant Society (ncwildflower.org) and the NC Audubon Society (ncaudubonblog.org)

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