



## A FEW WORDS ON THE MIGHTY OAK

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Elsewhere in this issue is found an account of the successful efforts by the Natural History Society and other conservation minded citizens and organizations to save the eleven acre hardwood stand at Royalty Oaks. It therefore seems appropriate to learn something of the natural history of the oak.

The species in question for P.E.I. is the red oak (Quercus rubra), the only oak native to this province. In Canada red oak is found across the southern part of the country from Ontario eastward to the Maritimes. It prefers well-drained upland soils and characteristically grows in pure stands or mixed with white pine or other deciduous trees. It does not tolerate much competition. Red oaks generally grow to heights of 20 to 25 m and occasionally reach 30 m. Usual diameters range from .3 to 1 m or more. A red oak grown in the open tends to develop a short thick trunk with a relatively small number of large spreading branches. Woodland grown red oaks have tall straight trunks and smaller crowns. The root system is deep and spreading. The bark is grey, smooth in young trees, but becoming cracked into longitudinal ridges with age. Oaks are slow growing but sturdy, and often attain a considerable age.

The leaves of the red oak have pointed lobes and, compared to other native trees, appear relatively late in the spring. As the leaves are unfolding, flowers come out, with the clusters of slender green-yellow male catkins as well as the tiny female flowers being found at the tip of the same twig. The fruit develops as an acorn, which for red oak requires two years to mature. Red oak twigs are stout and smooth, dark red to greenish brown in colour.

Oak wood is hard, heavy and strong. Its chief uses are for furniture and flooring, although it is sometimes also used for making casks. In the past red oaks on P.E.I. (and elsewhere) were prized for shipbuilding.

Reference: Hosie, R.C. 1973. Native Trees of Canada. Information Canada. Ottawa. 380 p.

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SHAGGY MANE EATERS BEWARE. According to Uberto Tosco in The World of Mushrooms (Orbis, London, 1973) "a peculiar and distinctive form of poisoning can be shown by the Common Inkcap (Coprinus atramentarius). It contains a substance which is particularly soluble in alcohol so that any wine or other alcoholic drink which is drunk after a meal containing the Inkcap brings on the symptoms: these include the face and other parts of the body becoming purple, together with increased heart beat and gastric upsets. The effect can be shown some time after the meal, too, even as much as two days afterwards! This does not appear to happen with young specimens.

