

Forest Facts

Grow Your Own Oak Tree

Oaks are easy to grow and develop rapidly. Trees that best survive are the native trees that have evolved genetic traits favoring the local conditions of soil, moisture, climate, etc. By planting acorns from local trees, you maximize chances for survival and minimize damaging local stock by introducing trees with poorly adapted genes.

Here's how to proceed:

1. Collect acorns in the fall from healthy, vigorous trees in your neighborhood—from the tree or under it on the ground, choosing large acorns. Remove the cap if it is attached.
2. Soak acorns for one hour if picked off the tree or 24 hours if taken from the ground. Add 1/2 cup of bleach per gallon to the water. Discard any acorns that float or have holes, cracks or other defects. Dry the acorns on towels, newspaper or other absorbent material.
3. Pack the acorns in zip-lock plastic bags and place in refrigerator (not freezer) for at least a month. This should stimulate faster and more complete germination. Check the stored acorns occasionally for mold. If mold develops, repeat the soaking and drying and return to the refrigerator. Acorns can be stored in the refrigerator for several months.
4. After refrigeration, plant the acorn in the ground or in a container (see Paragraph 6). When planting in the ground, choose a sunny, weed-free spot with well-drained soil. With a hand trowel or shovel, dig a shallow hole. Loosen the soil several inches under the hole and add a pinch of Miracle Grow. Plant the acorn sideways, one inch below the surface. Water lightly.
5. Water weekly until the seedling is well established. Do not over-water; this will cause the acorn to rot. After the seedling is established, watering two or three times during the dry season should be sufficient.
6. For container-grown seedlings, use a quart milk carton or similar container slit near the bottom for drainage. Fill with potting soil. Thoroughly moisten the soil and place on a saucer or pie tin. After planting acorn, place the container near a window where it will receive adequate light.
7. Container-grown seedlings should be transferred to the planting site when 3 to 4 inches high. Scrape a circle two feet in diameter around the seedling to remove other vegetation, thus eliminating competition for moisture. Placing some type of mulch around the seedling will also help conserve moisture and discourage competing plants.

For further information, call the Carmel Forestry Department at 624-3543. Acorns are available from Friends of Carmel Forest by calling 625-2855.

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