

From Acorn to Oak

From start to finish, growing a sapling from an acorn is a fun way to help DuPage oaks. Here's how to do it!

Find some acorns. Ask someone you know with an oak for some acorns. (Remember, collecting anything plant-related in a forest preserve isn't allowed.)

Do a float test. Place the acorns in water for at least an hour. Discard any that float. They won't grow. Dry off any that sank.

"Stratify." Acorns need a period of cold, moist dormancy called "stratification" to germinate. To stratify yours, place them in a sealed plastic bag with moistened peat, vermiculite, sawdust or similar materials. Keep the bag in a refrigerator for at least 40 days.

Watch. Check your acorns from time to time. Keep the material around them moist but not too wet, and don't allow it to dry out. Roots may emerge after 40 days, but even if they don't you can still move to the next step.

Place in a pot. For each acorn, fill a well-draining 1-gallon pot with soil, and plant the acorn an inch below the surface. Put the pot indoors by a south-facing window so it gets the warm winter sun.



Wait. Keep the soil moist, and don't let it dry out. Your oak will be ready to move outdoors when it's about 6 inches tall and has small leaves and a long white root, called a "taproot." This can take several months.

Two weeks out, pick a good spot. Before you're ready to plant (spring or fall is best), pick a site that has plenty of sunlight and is away from sidewalks, buildings, and power and water lines. Place your pot there for a few hours each day to get your oak used to the outdoors.

Dig. At your planting site, mark off a 3-foot-wide circle, and remove any plants or turf inside the area. Dig a hole as deep as the taproot is long. Break up any clumps in the soil you remove.

Plant. Gently place the oak in the hole, taproot down and leaves facing up. Use your free hand to fill the hole with loose soil. Pat the soil around the tree, and water it. Mulch, sloping away from the tree. The mulch shouldn't touch the trunk.

Give it two years of TLC. Put wire fencing around your oak to protect it from hungry critters. Trickle water around the edge — not down the trunk — two or three times a week. Don't trim any of the stems. In winter, use a plastic gardening cone to protect it from snow and ice.

Enjoy! Your oak should be happily growing on its own after two years and producing acorns in about 20. Watch your tree thrive, and feel good about having done something wonderful for the environment!

