

Collecting Acorns (modified from O'Conner, Indiana DNR)



#1

#2

#3

#4

Photo #1 = immature white oak acorns (northern Indiana, late July), Photo #2 = nearly mature acorns in late August-early September, Photo #3 = mature acorns, Photo #4 = root growing from white oak acorn

- Find a white oak tree that likely grew from an acorn that nature (versus humans) planted. These would be trees in a forested or woodland setting ***but not in a landscaped setting.***
- Look for white oak trees with acorns on them (you might need to use binoculars) about 2-3 weeks prior to collection. The majority of seed will be in the upper crown on the south side of the tree. Birds and squirrels eat nearly ripe acorns on the tree so a tree with lots of green acorns might not have many that actually fall to the ground for you to collect.
- White oak acorns drop from the tree starting in mid-September in the northern part of the US and late October or early November in the south. For example, in Indiana acorns fall in late September in the north but not until late October in southern Indiana. If there has not been much rain in the autumn, the seed could fall up to 2 weeks earlier than normal.
- Bad seeds (unfilled, diseased, or gall/insect infested) will fall before the good seed on a particular tree, so wait until most or all of the seed on the tree has fallen to the ground.
- White oak acorns need to be collected as soon as possible after they have fallen because the root will emerge from the acorn soon after they hit the ground. If root is broken, the seed will die. You can still collect white oak acorns that have a cracked "shell" and/or and emerging root as long as the root is very short (less than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch). The emerging root shown in photo #4 is too long for that acorn to be collected because it will break off and the acorn will die before it can be planted.
- Do not pull acorns off the tree, and do not collect acorns with attached caps or caps that do not slip off easily. These acorns are not mature and unlike fruit such as apples or peaches which can continue to ripen once you pick them, acorns will NOT "ripen" to maturity once they leave the tree. If the cap falls off an acorn as you pick it up, or the cap falls off easily when you touch it, then you can collect that acorn because it is mature. If you have to pull on the cap to get it to come off, do NOT collect that acorn because it was not mature when it dropped off the tree.
- Do not collect acorns that have "pin holes" on the outside of the acorn because they are infested with insects.
- Use ONE collection kit per tree and put all acorns from a single tree into the gallon zip-lock bag included in the collection kit. Note the plastic bag has holes punched in it so the acorns get the oxygen they need to stay alive. Keep the bags in a cool place (such as a basement) prior to shipping them. Heat and desiccation will kill the acorns so don't leave the acorns in your car.
- If you have a smart phone, load the free TreeSnap app onto it (see TreeSnap.org), take a picture of each tree you collected acorns from, and answer the questions in TreeSnap for each tree. **If you are collecting from more than one tree, give each tree an identifier in TreeSnap (e.g., tree #1, #2, etc.) and write the tree identifier from Tree Snap on the collection ziplock bag.** You can also load TreeSnap onto an I-pad and take a photo that way.
- Fill out the information on the card enclosed with each collection kit: **your name, date collected, and the State, County, nearest town to the tree, the tree identifier from your TreeSnap entry and GPS coordinates of the tree** (if you used TreeSnap it will give you the GPS coordinates).
- Use the postage paid box to get the white oak acorns to the University of Kentucky as soon as possible because they need to be planted in the nursery within a few days after collection. However, be mindful of the arrival day at UK; it is better to keep your acorn collection in a cool place such as your basement rather than have them arrive at UK on the weekend where they will sit in the hot mailroom until Monday.
- If you are not absolutely certain of the species identification, and you can reach twigs and/or leaves from your tree(s), please include them along with a few acorn caps with the seed.