

Summer 7-1-2012

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### Recommended Citation

Meyer, Bill, "A Glance at the Chinkapin Oak" (2012). *Stories from the Arboretum*. 8.  
<https://openriver.winona.edu/wsuarboretumstories/8>

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## A Glance at the Chinkapin Oak

Bill Meyer, WSU Senior Groundskeeper (Retired)



How about this past month of March! Trees bloomed 3 to 4 weeks early. Magnolias, Redbuds, Plums and Pear trees all flowered about the same time, followed by Crabapples and Lilacs in the first week of April. Temperatures stayed in the 70's and low 80's throughout much of the month. Now with all the wind and higher temperatures and lack of significant precipitation, I find myself watering younger trees at my home. Usually, I don't have to worry about watering until late May. Crazy weather.

This month I would like to discuss one of our native trees to Minnesota, the Chinkapin Oak or Chinquapin Oak, *Quercus Muehlenbergii*. The Chinkapin Oak is one of 52 trees recognized by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as being native to the Land of 10,000 Lakes. The common name, Chinkapin, refers to the resemblance of the leaves to Chinkapins or Chestnuts. A Chinkapin is a small Chestnut tree or shrub that is commonly found in the eastern U.S. The Latin or botanical name honors Henry Muehlenbergii, a Pennsylvania botanist.

The leaves of the tree seem to be the most defining characteristic of the tree. Besides the comparison to a Chestnut leaf, the Chinkapin Oak leaf has been said to resemble the flint arrows of Native Americans. This medium to large sized Oak will produce sweet acorns that are highly prized by wildlife. The Chinkapin Oak likes full sun and ample room to spread its wide branches.

The Chinkapin Oak is one of five native trees to Minnesota that were lost for various reasons on the WSU campus over the past two years. Growing a tree native to Minnesota can be as challenging as growing any other tree. Consideration to site, moisture, soil and ph are critical for success. WSU is replacing the lost Chinkapin Oak this spring and has plans to replace the other lost native trees as soon as possible. The new Chinkapin Oak will be planted near the southwest corner of the Tau Center.

WSU is currently considering a new, exciting proposal that would designate the campus grounds as a landscape arboretum. What does this mean? Briefly, the WSU grounds and other properties associated with WSU would be designated as places of beauty, public education and scientific study. A new Landscape Arboretum fund would be established to provide private resources to supplement state resources in order to enhance our campus as a regional Landscape Arboretum.

A Landscape Arboretum committee has been set up to examine all possibilities associated with this proposal. Recommendations to replace any lost native trees were placed on the top the list of things to do. The Chinkapin Oak discussed earlier was one of the trees on the list. In addition, identification signs should begin to appear by many of the trees throughout the summer months. Soon, many flower and ornamental gardens will also sport identification signs.

Finally, as the new tree identification signs appear, people will be able to use a QR (Quick Response) code displayed on the sign to access information on the tree using text and graphics from the two WSU tree books. For instance, people walking by a tree can point their smartphone at a tree sign with a QR Code and be connected to a website with information and photos. Incredible!

Much more to come. Stay tuned!