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Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)

Nebraska Forest Service

The black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) is not a very common tree to plant in your landscape. The large nuts can cause a real problem in the fall and most landowners tend to shy away from trees with heavy fruit. But black walnut remains as a very lovely tree through its life and it is found on many farms in woodlots and around the farm buildings. It is most well known for its wood that is used for veneer to make fine paneling and furniture. High quality cabinets as well as many other products including musical instruments rely on walnut. The wood is also used for gun stocks.



The Latin name for black walnut, *Juglans nigra*, means black or dark nut of Jupiter. Black walnut is a native tree that occurs throughout the Midwest from the southern part of Minnesota to the northern most counties in Florida and from the middle of Oklahoma through New Jersey to the Atlantic Ocean. The prime growing region for the most valuable trees is located through Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and some parts of Missouri and Iowa.

Black walnut is a large forest tree growing to be well over 70 feet in height at maturity. The national champion is located on Sauvie Island, Oregon (out of the natural range) and is 130 feet tall with a circumference of 278 inches.



The leaves of black walnut are dark green with almost a tropical appearance. The bark is brown and when sliced it resembles the rich color of the wood. The fruit is a little bit smaller than a baseball and it has a pungent odor. Squirrels love it and will spend a great deal of time in the fall harvesting and storing the nuts.

But the real prize for walnut lovers is the wood. Walnut wood has long been one of the most valuable hardwoods. In the late seventies, a large black walnut tree in northwestern Ohio fetched the tidy sum of \$35,000.00. Yep, that's 35 grand for just one tree. Now before you start counting your money, this particular tree was 38 inches in diameter at 4.5 feet above ground level and it

was 50 feet to the first limb. There was not a single flaw in for the entire 50 feet. Forestry offices in Nebraska often get calls about walnut from people who think they have a fortune in the back yard. This is usually not the case. But growing black walnut for timber in forested conditions can be profitable.

Black walnut is a fast growing tree and can put on 12 to 24 inches of height growth per season once it becomes established. It loves well drained bottomland and requires a rich soil. It will tolerate dry, poor soils but the cost is slower growth. It has a course branching habit, which makes it very pleasing in the winter landscape.

Black walnut has few insect or disease enemies with the exception of fall webworm and walnut caterpillar. Both of these insects can be controlled and are more of a nuisance than a threat.

Walnut can present some problems in that parts of the plant have been shown to be poisonous to farm animals. Horses in particular can be affected. Walnut also emits a chemical called juglone that will have an adverse affect on some garden plants like potato, tomato and pepper. It can also be a problem for other woody plants nearby like apple, birch, and some pine and spruce species.