

The Northern Pecan

By Kathleen Cue, Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator in Dodge County

In preparation for April 14's National Pecan Day, what better way to celebrate the day than planting your very own northern pecan tree, *Carya illinoensis*. Native to southern Wisconsin and the northern parts of Illinois and Iowa and extending south to Texas, the northern pecan can handle winter temperatures as low as -35 degrees F. It has pinnately compound leaves that turn a beautiful yellow color in the fall. This tree gets large, upwards of 70 feet, with a crown extending 40 feet or more, so give it plenty of room at planting time.

The northern pecan tree is monoecious, meaning it has both female and male flowers on the same tree. The best nut production, however, is ensured when more than one pecan variety is planted. The nuts mature around mid-October and are highly nutritious. From planting, northern pecan trees can start producing in as little as 6 years.

The northern pecan is not fussy as to soil pH, being tolerant of alkaline as well as acidic soils. They do, however, need to be in a well-draining soil to prevent crown and root problems. The extensive tap root that the northern pecan develops makes it highly drought tolerant but it also limits recommendations for a starter-sized tree. People seeking the best results for nut production from their northern pecans should start with small trees, those started in 4-inch pots are ideal. Starting with such a small size isn't an impediment—the idea is to get a small tree planted before a deep tap root has developed. Since the northern pecan has such a wide native range, purchasing a tree from a nursery that collects seeds from the northern parts of its range will be important to assure winter hardiness. Once happily planted, the northern pecan doesn't waste any time when it comes to growing, increasing in height more than 12 inches each growing season.

If you're interested in knowing more about growing the northern pecan, or any type of nut tree suitable for this area, check out the Nebraska Nut Growers Association at nebraskanutgrowers.org and the Northern Nut Growers Association at nutgrowing.org.