

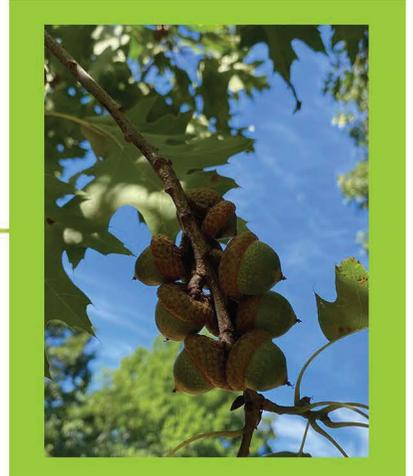
# Tally Ho, Let's Grow!

Plant an acorn for Oaktober

## Tally Ho!

Even the mightiest, tallest tree starts out as a tiny seed. For an oak tree, that seed is called an acorn. In its lifetime, an oak tree may produce *millions* of acorns, but only a lucky few will sprout into a new tree. Many will be eaten by hungry animals preparing for winter, such as foxes, bears, deer, woodpeckers, blue jays, and squirrels. Others won't land in a place where the conditions are right for it to grow. *Oh no!*

Fear not, Nature Cat fan extraordinaire. You can help by collecting some acorns and planting them. And the best part about planting a tree? It is a gift to the living things of today and tomorrow. Are you ready? *Onward and acorn-ward!*



## What You'll Need

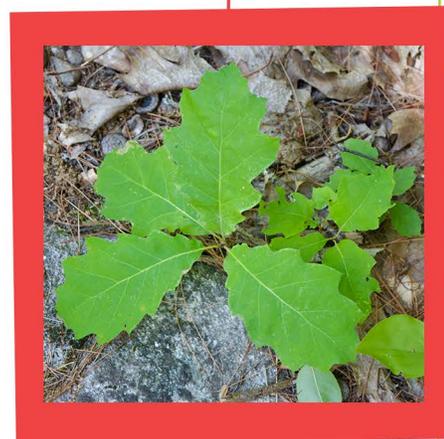
-  Small basket or container to use for collecting acorns
-  Small bowl, mason jar, or other similar container that can hold at least a few inches of water
-  Potting soil
-  Planting pot, at least eight inches deep (you can also use a cleaned **milk carton** or jug with holes added for drainage.)

## Let's Plant

-  **Step One:** Gather your collecting materials. You'll need your basket, small bowl, and a reusable water bottle filled with water.
-  **Step Two:** With an adult, head outside to your backyard or a local park to collect some acorns. Acorns that look plump, feel a little heavy, and have caps you can easily remove are likely ripe and ready for planting.



- 🍂 **Step Three:** Let's check to make sure these acorns are good for planting! Fill your container with water and add your acorns. If any float, they should be discarded. Acorns that sink are more likely to grow!
- 🍂 **Step Four:** Ready to plant? We suggest planting very soon after you collect your acorns to keep them from drying out. Planting more than one makes it more likely you'll have success (no more than two per pot). Prepare your pot by filling it with potting soil, leaving about one inch at the top. If you want to make your own pot out of a milk carton, check out this Nature Cat [activity](#) for ideas.
- 🍂 **Step Five:** Poke a hole in the dirt in the middle of the pot about one inch deep. Place the acorn in the hole by laying it on its side. Cover the acorn with dirt.
- 🍂 **Step Six:** Water your acorns and place the pot in a sunny place.
- 🍂 **Step Seven:** Check your pot every few days to make sure the soil is moist. *Tip: Stick your finger in the soil (not where you planted the acorn). If the top inch is dry, it's time to water.*
- 🍂 **Step Eight:** Be patient! It may take about two to four weeks for the root to start growing and a few weeks more for the seedling to poke through the dirt. Only keep one seedling per pot, if more than one acorn sprouts.
- 🍂 **Step Nine:** When you see the first leaves open, it's time to transplant your seedling either to a bigger, deeper pot or into the ground outside. If you don't have a place to plant your seedling near your home, such as your backyard, check with a local park official or your school to see if you can plant it there. *Tip: When you remove the seedling from its pot, take care not to damage the tap root. It may go all the way down to the bottom of the pot!*



## Tips:

Early fall is a good time of year to find acorns for planting. There are hundreds of kinds of oak trees, and they all produce acorns. But the time of year the acorns sprout isn't the same for all oak trees. The acorns of white oak and swamp white oak trees will sprout right away. Most other kinds of oak trees have acorns that need to be kept cool and moist for several weeks before they will sprout. This is called **stratification**. It mimics the conditions for the acorns if they were left on the forest floor for the winter.

If you have collected acorns that need to be kept cool before they will sprout, you can plant them in your pots and place them outside, or you can place them in a container with a damp peat mix and keep the container in the refrigerator for about five to six weeks. For more information, visit [Iowa State University Extension and Outreach](https://www.iaaf.org/extension-and-outreach).

How can you tell what kind of tree produced your acorn? Check the chart at the end of the activity for help. You can also visit <https://www.arboday.org/trees/whattree/> or try one of these free apps: LeafSnap or Seek by iNaturalist.

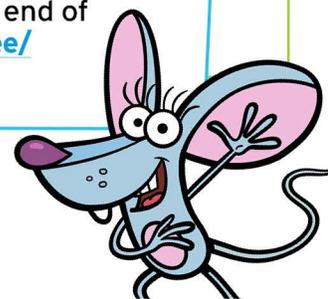
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## Onward and Yonward! Take it Further.

**Fun fact:** The cap of an acorn is called a **cupule** (say KYOO-pyool). The acorn cap provides some extra protection for the seed. If you save a cap, you can turn it into a whistle! Hold the cap with your thumbs and forefingers. Make a "Y" with your thumbs by touching your thumb knuckles together and angling them away from each other. In between the Y you should see the top of the acorn cap. Put your mouth over the knuckles of your thumbs so air will come out from your top lip. Blow hard! If no sound comes out, reposition your thumbs and try again.



While you wait for your acorn to sprout, make a **nature journal** where you can keep track of your acorn's progress. You can write down the planting date, the dates you water, and the date you first see the seedling break through the dirt. Include pictures, too, of your acorn and what you think your oak tree will look like one day. You can also make a bark rubbing and tape an oak leaf from the 'parent tree' to a page in your journal. What else do you want to include in your journal?

## Partnership

The Tally Ho, Let's Grow Activity was created in partnership with:



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# Oak Leaves & Acorns



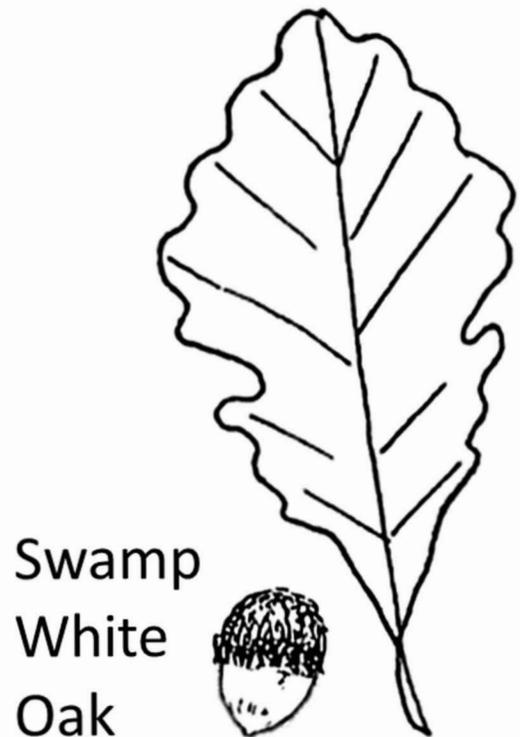
Red Oak



White Oak



Burr Oak



Swamp White Oak

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