



Inspired by Big Trees

BY JULIA LO EHRHARDT, EDUCATION COORDINATOR | August 20, 2010

“It is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon men's hearts, as for that subtle something, that quality of air that emanates from old trees, that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit.”

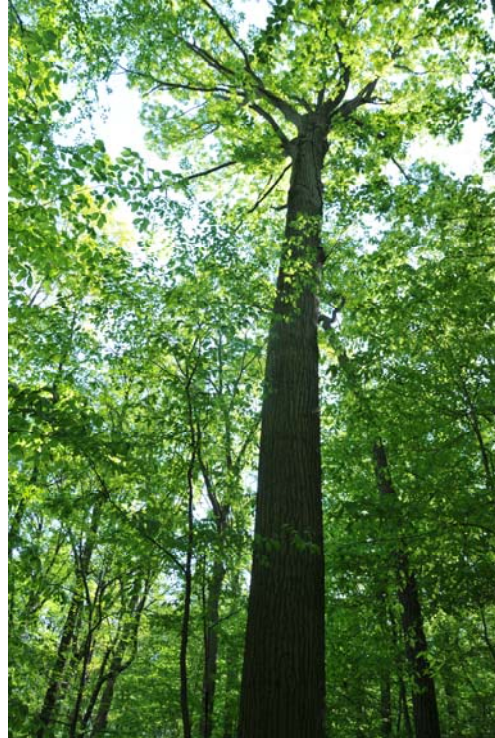
Robert Louis Stevenson

Trees enrich our lives by providing beauty, shade, shelter, food, medicines and inspiration. Each one of us recollects childhood days of climbing trees, swinging from trees, raking leaves or creating whistles from tree leaves. Some of us may have had chance to climb a beech, feel the sinuous trunk of an iron wood or seen the shafts of light entering the tulip poplar forest. Some of these trees live for thousands of years, asking only for soil, water and light – contributing much to the world. Our lives are enriched by these encounters. How can we give back?

We can start by appreciating them, learning about them and saving them from demise. The [US Forestry Big Trees Program](#), celebrating its 70th anniversary this year, has been instrumental in documenting giant trees of the United States. This program gave us more reasons to explore nature, looking for these aged creatures. Anyone can nominate a tree which is “outstanding” in the field.

According to the National Registry, Sussex County, Delaware has the **national champion scrub pine**, *Pinus virginiana*. It stands 89ft tall with a 40ft spread. Do you know that the **largest** tree in Delaware is a **Zelkova** in Greenville? Although it is not a native tree, the Zelkova was used to replace the American elm which was in decline due to Dutch elm disease. The Greenville Zelkova stands 76ft tall with a 106ft spread. The **tallest** tree of Delaware is a 166ft tall tulip poplar, *Liriodendron tulipifera*, on the grounds of Winterthur. What's the difference between the largest and tallest? What is a champion?

Trees are ranked according to a point system. The points are accumulated through three measurements. They are the circumference, the height, and the average crown spread. A tall tree may have a narrow crown and a shorter tree may have a wide crown but the latter may be the biggest due to the point system. The state champion would be the biggest for that species in the state. The champion would be the largest of that species in the United States.



Trees enrich our lives in so many ways.



Jim Subach, natural lands manager, standing by Mt. Cuba Center's largest white oak.

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Big trees are in our neighborhood and you need to go visit them. Here's a few:

Eastern red cedar

Do you know that Delaware's only native juniper is the **eastern red cedar**, *Juniperus virginiana*. The largest specimen is located near Route 82 in Yorklyn and stands 90ft tall. Eastern red cedar is found in open areas, hedgerows and along forest edges. The wood was traditionally used to line closets and chests as it was aromatic and light weight. Eastern red cedar is important to wildlife. As an evergreen, it provides good nesting and roosting cover for many birds. Dense thickets provide good escape cover for deer, and the abundant foliage provides emergency food for them during times of stress. Eastern red cedar fruits are eaten by many wildlife species, including waxwings, bobwhite, quail, ruffed grouse, pheasant, wild turkeys, rabbits, foxes, raccoons, skunks, opossums, and coyotes.

Flowering Dogwood

The biggest **flowering dogwood**, *Cornus florida* in the state of Delaware is located in the Brandywine Cemetery. Standing tall at 36ft tall and spreading out 36.5ft, it is a magnificent tree in flower. Both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson planted flowering dogwoods in their garden – enamored with its beauty. Craftsmen use the wood for the making of chisel handles, small pulleys, spindles, knitting needles, hay forks and barrel hoops. The wood of this tree does not splinter easily when blunt force is applied.

Ohio Buckeye

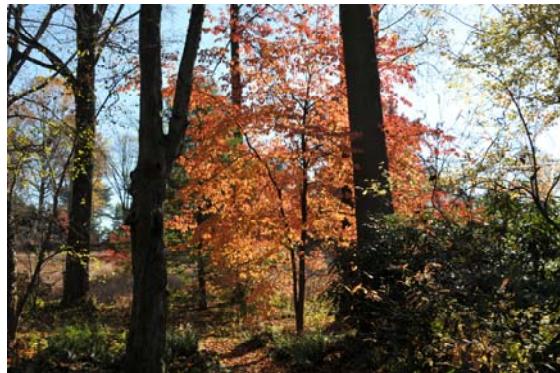
Located near Old Lancaster Pike in Hockessin is the biggest **Ohio buckeye**, *Aesculus glabra*, in the state of Delaware. It stands 73ft tall with a 55ft spread. The US champion, located in DuPage, Illinois, only stands 73ft tall but is 68ft wide. Okay, it has more girth. Also known as the stinking buckeye (bruised bark gives off a malodor), all parts of this tree are poisonous when ingested. The Ohio buckeye puts out beautiful greenish white flowers in spring and is one of the first trees to color in the fall.



The majestic tulip poplar is an iconic tree at Mt. Cuba Center.



Flowering dogwood in spring.



Flowering dogwood in fall.

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Champions at Mt. Cuba Center

A state champion grows on the grounds of Mt. Cuba Center and it is the **chestnut oak**, *Quercus prinus*. Towering at 117ft, this magnificent specimen will be on our [Big Trees of Delaware](#) route for those who want to visit it. Good crops of chestnut oak acorns are infrequent, but when available the acorns are eaten by numerous upland wildlife species, including white-tailed deer, squirrels, chipmunks, mice, and wild turkeys. Small birds and mammals, as well as insects such as bees, use chestnut oak cavities for nesting.

Another big tree (not quite on the top 5 list for the state) growing on the grounds is the deciduous conifer, **dawn redwood**, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*. Preferring to grow in wet sites, the dawn redwood can tolerate drought conditions once established. The dawn redwood is very similar looking to the native **bald cypress**, *Taxodium distichum*. The most conspicuous difference is that dawn redwood has rounded depressions that look like armpits beneath where the branches attach to the trunk.

These are but a few big trees on the [Big Trees Registry for Delaware](#). If you would like to learn more from professionals, join our [Big Trees of Delaware](#) class with Jim Subach of Mt. Cuba Center and Glenn Gladders from the Delaware Forest Service. They will take you to these great trees in the Red Clay area within the Piedmont and share with you wonderful tales and facts about these silent giants. Sign up soon as class size is limited.



The Ohio buckeye flowers in May.



Fruits of Ohio buckeye are extremely poisonous.

For more information:

To review the “*National Registry of Big Trees*”

www.americanforests.org/resources/bigtrees/BigTreeRegister2010new.pdf

To review “*Big Trees of Delaware*”

<http://dda.delaware.gov/images/forestry/BigTreesOfDelawareThirdEdition.pdf>



About the Author

JULIA LO EHRHARDT — EDUCATION COORDINATOR

Julia has been with Mt. Cuba Center since 2007 in the Public Programs department. Her previous positions include assistant director of horticulture at Baywood Greens, horticulturist at Longwood Gardens, and director of the School of Professional Horticulture at the New York Botanical Garden. Julia has a Bachelor of Science in Horticulture degree and Masters of Public Horticulture Administration.