

The Care and Feeding of Black Walnut Trees



Juglans Nigra (Black Walnut) trees are a North American hardwood (grown above the 38th parallel) known for its durability and a patina which becomes more lustrous with age. The creamy white sapwood transitions to a light chocolate in the heartwood and sometimes has a purplish cast with darker strands. The wood dries slowly and may be banded. It is straight grained with some wavy or curly grains and stains easily. It can be highly polished. The trees can grow 80' to 120' with an average 3' diameter in nature but may be 100' to 150' with close planting for dense forest competition, selective cultivation, trimming and care and may exceed this height depending on age at harvest. The leaves are pinnate with the male catkins hanging limply with the female terminal and ripen in clusters of 2 to 5.

Currently, all black walnut wood is from old growth trees harvested as individual trees in the wild. They grow shorter and more rounded with numerous branches at all heights which give a knotted look of pine in a majority of the wood. Most cutting is the standard 16' lengths with shorter lengths harvested for veneer with no options for premium beams. The juglans produced by the tree assures little competition in nature as it kills most vegetation growing near the tree allowing for a shorter tree with spreading branches. Short and broad is great for nut production but the trees in this orchard are being grown for high quality wood. All nuts will be left for the squirrels.

The black walnut trees in the orchard vary from 4 to 9 years and individual trees have been replaced if destroyed by deer, disease or wind. The orchard has been weeded and mowed to prevent undergrowth from strangling trees and juglans is developing in the older trees and will serve to prevent grass from chocking them in the future. In the older orchard to the SE of this one, mowing has become unnecessary as all the trees produce juglans. Occasional mowing is done to allow adequate observation as to the health of each tree and to eliminate walnut caterpillars which usually hatch in June. The orchard has been treated with Milky Spore (organic) for three years to eliminate Japanese Beetles. Many of the tree tubes which were used in planting have been removed and a lower collar is in place to protect the base of each tree. Tree tubes are replaced if deer show interest in rubbing the soft bark to eliminate their fur or when in rut. The hardness of the bark rather than the size of the tree is the standard used for this decision. All clippings, including the leaf drop, are mowed and left to rot over winter to create fertilizer and new soil. Pruning is an ongoing process with younger trees to assure straight tree trunks without potential branches creating knots in the wood. The canopy must support enough leaves to assure healthy growth of the tree. Any trees found to have fungi, etc. or too damaged for potential growth have been removed. Most were replaced with new trees and a few, which had begun new growth on their own, have been preserved in tubes to allow them to develop naturally. No chemicals have been used on or near the trees. The orchard is operated as a NY farm with applicable tax benefits.