

August - Week 3

Acorns are Falling

Have you ever picked up an acorn to look at it more carefully? They are an amazing part of nature! Acorns are, of course, the seed of oak trees. A planted acorn can grow up to one meter of taproot in its first season, with just one stalk and a few leaves above ground! Young oak trees grow slowly because they are building a strong root system. Minnesota's most common species of oak are bur oaks, white oaks, and northern red oaks. One way to tell these species apart is by comparing the acorns. Acorns can range from $\frac{1}{4}$ to 2 inches long. The caps vary in size and texture, and the nut itself may be striped or plain.

Acorns also serve as an important food source for a number of animals because they are a large seed with much nutritional value. Gray squirrels collect and bury acorns in many small caches; they use these for food during the winter season. Blue Jays also bury acorns for food later. Some of these cached acorns remain buried and grow into oak seedlings. Acorns are also a food source for deer, ground squirrels, wood ducks, mice, rabbits, and many insects. Acorns are an essential component of a forest ecosystem.

Can you find a few acorns in your neighborhood, park, or schoolyard? What tree did they drop from? Do you see any evidence of animals collecting or eating acorns? Have you found any small holes in the ground where a squirrel or blue jay may have stored a cache of acorns? In your journal, record what you have seen or noticed about acorns this year. Draw several different acorns and label the differences between them. Sketch a food chain that begins with an acorn.

Acorns are but one seed amongst many this time of year. Maple helicopter seeds, sand burs, milkweed pods, and dandelion puffballs are all interesting seeds. If you do not have access to acorns, choose another type of seed to observe, compare, and journal about.

