

David And An Acorn

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When my son David was in 4-H, he needed a project. Since we had no place to accommodate animals, but did have a tree farm, we agreed that a forestry project would be a good alternative. At age 15, David was already showing a serious interest in the scientific method and how to apply it in his world. I was exploring establishing trees by direct seeding as opposed to purchasing seedlings from a nursery. The use of tree tubes to protect seedlings from animal damage was in its infancy. In July of 1992, Joe Lais, the future founder of Plantra, Inc., visited Perkey Tree Farm and introduced the idea of protection for tree seeds (walnuts, acorns, etc.) from predation by animals.

Knowing that red oak and white pine grow well together, we decided to mix the 2 species on a gently sloping site that I already had cleared of poor quality old-field vegetation. We chose to limit the seeding aspect of the project to red oak acorns. On December 19, 1992, as a part of the project, we seeded some of the acorns in protecting devices called Quills (shown below). The spring of 1993, we followed up and planted the white pine seedlings.



Results were inconclusive. Acorn losses to animal predation during the winter and through the spring were severe to both protected and unprotected acorns. Comparison was not feasible. Animals like chipmunks and voles are very good at finding food sources, including red oak acorns.

In 2004, a real estate problem developed for the 4-H project site. We needed to build an access road, and the best location included the gently sloping area we had chosen for the seeding trial. By that time, Dave had long-ago moved beyond 4-H, and earned a BS in Marine Science and a Masters Degree in Earth Science. We accepted the significant reduction of area to have the benefit of good vehicle access. In 2008, 3 of



the surviving red oaks had reached sapling size and showed promise.

In 2013, two of the few red oaks that had successfully germinated and become established were selected to be in a group of pole-sized red oak to be monitored for growth. Red Oak # 1 (behind & to David's left in the 2008 photo) was 5.3" diameter breast high (dbh). David's hand is on a somewhat less desirable competitor.



In May 2022, David completed his formal education and received his PhD in Oceanography. In November 2022, I applied a crown touching release to Red Oak # 1 (pictured above). It was 9.7" dbh. That release included felling the other nearby, surviving, somewhat less desirable pole-size red oak. Dave and the tree are well prepared for productive years ahead. They have grown up together, and I have been blessed to be present to enjoy both of them.