

Tree tips column for October 1, 1999  
by: Steve Rasmussen, Forester

# Nebraska Champion Trees Program

Although Nebraska is considered a “prairie state”, trees have always played a prominent role in the quality of life in our state. From the native trees used to build and heat the first pioneer homes to the trees planted to beautify our parks, trees are enjoyed by all. Natural forests and planted trees provide beauty, protection, products, wildlife habitat, and other benefits. The Nebraska Champion Trees program builds awareness of how trees contribute to our “good life”.

The Nebraska Champion Trees program is designed to identify and recognize the largest living specimen of all native and the most common introduced tree species in Nebraska. Over 80 species are listed in the Nebraska Champion Trees register. These tree aristocrats are truly natural landmarks. A tree is defined as a woody plant having an erect, perennial stem or trunk. The trunk must measure at least 9 and ½ inches in circumference (approximately 3 inches in diameter) at 4 and ½ feet above ground (also called breast height). The tree must have a definitely-formed crown of live foliage and a height of at least 13 feet.

The Nebraska Champion Trees program uses rules of the American Forests’ Big Tree program. Tree circumference, vertical height and average crown spread are combined using the point system below:

**Circumference:** Measured at 4 and ½ feet above ground. One point for every inch of circumference.

**Height:** Measured vertically from the ground to the very top most part of the tree. One point is awarded for every foot of height.

**Crown spread:** Measured from the branch drip line of one side of the tree to the branch drip line at the opposite side of the tree. The widest and most narrow should be measured and then averaged. One point is given for every four feet of crown spread.

Total points for the three measurements are added and the tree in the species category with the largest number is the “champion”. The owner of the champion tree and the nominator will receive a Certificate of Recognition signed by the State Forester, the Chair of the Community Forestry Council and the Champion Tree Coordinator. Anyone can nominate a tree for inclusion in the Nebraska Champion Trees Register. If you think you have a state champion sized tree in your backyard or know of one in your neighborhood you would like to nominate, contact my office at UN- Northeast Research and Extension Center; Lifelong Learning Center; Suite 104, 601 East Benjamin Avenue; Norfolk, NE 68701-0812 or phone me at (402) 370-4024 for a nomination form and more details. Good luck “hunting” for those big trees!

This is the last Tree Tips column for 1999. If you have tree care / planting questions (or find a big tree to measure for champion status), contact me at the above location and phone number. In addition, John DuPlissis also with the Nebraska Forest Service and Lower Elkhorn NRD is another local forester available for tree related projects and can be reached at POB 1204; Norfolk, NE 68702-1204 or phone at (402) 371-7313. Have a great fall and winter and remember, “proper management produces healthy trees”!