

News Article
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Roger Vines
County Extension Coordinator

Tremendous Trees

Have you ever seen a tree that just made you say “WOW”? I know I have. A few years ago I had the opportunity to visit California and see some of the Giant Redwoods and it seems ironic to me that this little three letter word “wow” is the best way to describe something so big. It was a damp foggy day with water dripping all around, and the trees seemed to evaporate into the sky. I almost expected to see a *Tyranosaurus rex* come walking through the mist.

We don't have trees like that here in Coosa County but we do have some trees around here that still make you stop and say that little word. I saw one recently while visiting the home of Mary Franklin and her daughter Joan Hardy in Goodwater. They had called the Extension Office to check on the health of their huge oaks. It was an enjoyable visit to say the least. The largest tree was a white oak that measured fourteen and a half feet around the trunk. It was tall and wide and cast a shade over the entire yard.

I don't think I could even come close to guessing the age of this beautiful tree, but it had seen a lot of spring, summer, fall and winters come and go. It has weathered storms, wind, hail, droughts, freezing temperatures, and summers reaching near to or over one hundred degrees. How many birds have visited this tree or squirrels found their next meal of acorns here. The City of Goodwater has grown all around this landmark. Just think of the history this tree has seen.

The owner is a landmark in her own right. You see, Mary Franklin, is ninety nine years young and will turn one hundred this month. This is a sharp little lady who is a pleasure to talk to. She explained to me that she grew up in Clay County, but later moved to Goodwater. The oak tree was already there and they have lived side by side ever since. Mrs. Franklin credits some of her longevity to her enjoyment of working in the yard. I can just imagine the many times when she likely paused to cool off in the shade of her mighty oak friend.

The State Forestry Commission has a program that recognizes exceptionally large trees called the Champion Tree Program. It is listing of all the largest trees found and nominated by species. While Mrs. Franklin's tree does not yet qualify as a state champion it is still growing and in great condition.

Coosa County currently has two state champions – a Chinese Chestnut owned by George and Ronnie Zack in Mt. Moriah and a Sweetgum owned by George and Sondra Neighbors in Hanover, but has since suffered lightning damage that will likely lead to it's being dethroned. Another near state champion white oak belonged to David and Vivian Crosswy in Stewartville until about a year ago when it was toppled by a strong wind storm. The current white oak champion resides in Montgomery County and has a trunk that is eighteen feet around.

To make the Champion Tree list a formula is used to calculate the total score for the tree. The formula involves adding the circumference in inches, plus the height in feet, plus one fourth of the crown spread in feet. The sum of these measurements is the tree's total score. For some species this is a very large number but for others it may surprise you. For example the State Champion Witch-Hazel has a trunk that is only 12 inches around.

So if you think you have a large tree on your property, it may be a champion. A complete listing can be found on-line at www.forestry.alabama.gov. If you have a large tree and need help with identification or measurements, feel free to contact me at Coosa County Extension Office in Rockford or visit our website at <http://www.aces.edu/counties/Coosa/>. Remember that trees can be tremendous and sometimes the owners are pretty special too.



Mrs. Franklin's large white oak tree



Happy Birthday (Mrs. Franklin turns 100 this month)
Pictured Mary Franklin and daughter Joan Hardy