

Bloomfield Trees Measure Up

by Paula Jones (Bloomfield Messenger 3/15/2024 edition)

Bloomfield is blessed with a rich diversity of plant, animal, geological, and human resources. Among these resources are Bloomfield's trees. Trees provide critical environmental benefits and serve as tangible connections to the past as well as to the future.

Recognizing the cultural value of trees, the Notable Trees Project was established in 1985 for the purpose of collecting and distributing information about Connecticut's largest and most historic trees. A database is maintained at the Connecticut College Arboretum that includes records of 4,602 individual trees in the state. Fifty two of those trees are in Bloomfield; six of the 52 are on Traprock Ridge Land Conservancy's (TRLC) Hawk Hill Farm property.

Last week John Kehoe and Marty Aligata, two members of the Notable Trees Project, re-measured trees at Hawk Hill Farm at TRLC's request. The Land Conservancy plans to enhance its existing trail at Hawk Hill Farm later this year by adding informational tree signage about various tree species and wanted up-to-date information about the farm's big trees.

How does one go about determining if a tree is a large enough specimen of its species to be added to the Notable Tree database? You take three measurements of the tree which are used to calculate a point score for that tree:

1. Circumference of the tree at breast height (i.e. 4.5 ft. from the ground).
2. Average spread (of the branches) of the tree. This is done by laying out a tape measure from tip to tip of the longest extending branches.
3. Height of the tree. This is done by using a tape measure and clinometer to measure distance from the base of the tree and the angle to the top of the tree (forming a triangle). You then calculate the height using basic trigonometry.

Here's how Hawk Hill's trees currently measure up: Two White Oaks scored 280 and 257 points (top 70 in CT); two American Elms scored 261 and 233 points (top 40 in CT); a Pignut Hickory scored 207 points (top 20 in CT), and a Black Birch scored 195 points (top 15 in CT).

Note that point score ("size") doesn't always equate to status: the "smallest" tree measured, the Black Birch, is among the top 15 Black Birches that have been measured in Connecticut. The larger (more impressive-looking) trees are lower on the listing for their respective species. And the pecking order is always changing, as trees are added to and subtracted from the list.

On a more somber note, a Sugar Maple tree at Hawk Hill that was measured in 2012 (scoring 292.5 points) has since died. Bloomfield's magnificent American Elm next to Town Hall had been listed in the database, but was diseased and taken down in May, 2021 (reported in the May 21, 2021 *Bloomfield Messenger*). This is a reminder that, while appreciating the feeling of awe while visiting Bloomfield's current notable old trees, we also need to be planting new trees to become notable and inspire awe in some future generation.



Above: Hawk Hill Farm's 280 Point White Oak.



Above left: Kevin Gough and Marty Aligata approach the 261 point American Elm.
Above right: John Kehoe joins Kevin and Marty to measure the elm's circumference.