

Virginia Big Tree Program

QUICK FACTS
JANUARY 2026



Background:

- Mission is to document Virginia's largest trees and promote the care and appreciation of trees and forests throughout the state
- Began in 1970 as a 4-H and FFA program to encourage youth involvement in forestry and natural resources
- Coordinated by the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation at Virginia Tech
- Affiliated with the National Champion Tree Program at U. of Tenn.

Nominating & Scoring Big Trees:

- Trees are scored based on their trunk girth, overall height, and average crown spread (see back page for methods)
- Over 400 native and non-native species are eligible for nomination as determined by the National Champion Tree Program
- Nominated trees must be at least 13' tall and have a trunk girth greater than 9.5" measured at 4.5' above ground
- The 3 largest specimens of each species are actively registered

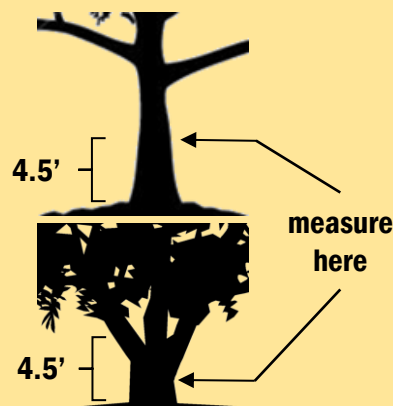
About the Big Tree Register:

- Number of active living trees registered: _____ 1,350
- Number of species with registered trees: _____ 285
- Number of national champs & co-champs in VA: _____ 93
- Number of counties and cities with registered big trees: _____ 117
- Tree of greatest trunk girth: ____ 43' (Baldcypress, Southampton co.)
- Tree of greatest height: _____ 184' (Tulip-poplar, Caroline co.)
- Tree of greatest crown spread: ____ 146' (So. red oak, Suffolk ct.)



Measuring Trunk Circumference:

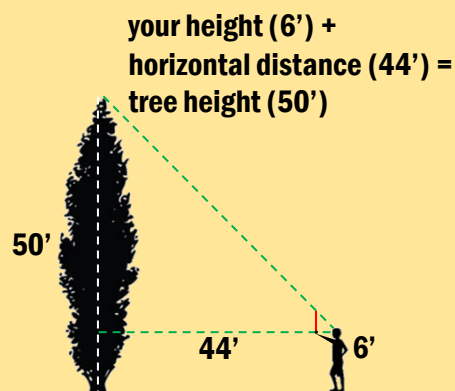
- On flat ground: wrap a reel tape around the trunk at a point 4.5' above ground level
- On sloped ground: wrap a reel tape around the trunk at a point 4.5' above the mid-slope position where the trunk emerges from the ground
- Branched or forked trunk: wrap a reel tape around the trunk base at the narrowest point below 4.5' height



1 big tree point per inch of trunk circumference

Measuring Tree Height:

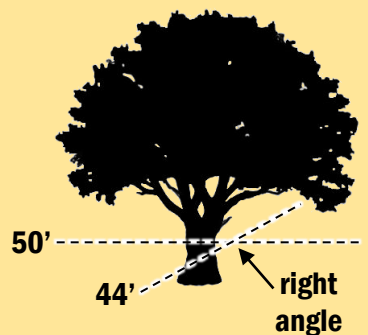
- Height is best measured with a precise instrument such as a clinometer or laser hypsometer
- The “stick trick” can be used for tree height when on flat ground and the peak of the tree is directly above the trunk
- Hold an arm-length stick vertically at eye level and sight the top of the tree to the top of the stick – move toward the tree
- The tree height is your distance to the tree plus your height



1 big tree point per foot of tree height

Measuring Crown Spread:

- Walk around the perimeter of the tree and find the maximum crown spread (doesn't have to go through the trunk)
- Measure the horizontal distance between these two points
- Turn perpendicular to the maximum crown spread and measure the maximum crown spread in that direction (doesn't have to go through the trunk)
- Average the two values



¼ big tree point per foot of average crown spread

Big Tree Score = trunk (in.) + height (ft.) + ¼ crown (ft.)