

forestry & natural resources

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

Wildlife Field Notes: Mast, An Important Wildlife Food Source

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Mast is a term used to describe the fruits of woody plants. The hard-shelled seeds of oak, hickory, walnut, and beech are termed "hard mast." The fruits of maple, elm, ash, basswood, and pine are dry mast compared to the fleshy fruits of trees like black cherry and mulberry.

Squirrels and chipmunks are the most conspicuous forms of wildlife that depend on hard mast for food. A wide variety of animals, however, eat hard-shelled fruits. These include the white-footed mouse, the white-tail deer, the blue jay, the wood duck, and the nuthatch, to mention only a few.

Hard mast is an especially important wildlife food in the fall and winter. It is high in fat content and is available when other plant foods (fleshy fruits and foliage) are not available.

Acorns are perhaps the most widely available and most commonly used form of mast. Can you identify the fruits of the black walnut, basswood, sugar maple, bitternut hickory, white ash, black oak, and chestnut oak in the accompanying illustration?



RR 5/90 (1M)

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