



Contest Rules and Instructions (contest ends July 15th, 2022)

Thank you for helping us with this USDA SARE-funded project to identify, preserve, and make available superior *Morus rubra* specimens. *Morus rubra* (red mulberry) is a vigorous, adaptable fruit-bearing tree native to eastern and central North America that is in serious decline due to hybridization with the imported *Morus alba* (white mulberry). Before this native treasure is lost for good, we are hoping to identify remaining superior, pure *Morus rubra* trees growing in the wild and establish a preserve and breeding orchard from which we can work to develop red mulberry as a food crop of significance. Please help us to further sustainable food access by participating in our search and rescue contest.

Who can participate?

Because our project is meant to benefit growers in the North Central Region of the United States, contest winners will be selected from USDA Hardiness Zones 7 and lower, however, we can still offer free testing to those in higher zones. Beyond this specification, the contest is open to anyone with an interest in mulberries.

How to participate:

Step 1: As soon as possible, identify fruit-producing *Morus rubra* trees that you think are worth sharing with other growers. Desirable traits could include fruit flavor, size, abundance, and overall quality, cold-hardiness, natural dwarfing of the tree, horizontal rather than upright branch growth habit, disease resistance, or any traits that facilitate the growth of and access to quality fruit. We are also interested in identifying several cold-hardy trees with male flowers.

Step 2: Properly identify the tree as *Morus rubra*. There are two common species of mulberry growing wild in the northeastern United States (*Morus rubra* and *Morus alba*), as well as hybrids of the two, plus the occasional backyard *Morus nigra*. Further southwest one may encounter the native Texas Mulberry (*Morus microphylla*) and in warmer climates, growers may be experimenting with other imported mulberry species. Distinguishing *Morus rubra* from among all of these can be difficult for beginners as red fruit is not necessarily indicative of a red mulberry tree and *Morus alba* its hybrids and many other species can have red fruit as well. Because of the many similarities among species and the difficulty of identifying hybrids, please do your best to make sure it is truly a red mulberry (*Morus rubra*). Use [this resource guide](#) to positively ID the tree as a *Morus rubra*

Step 3a: Return to the tree when the fruit is ripe in order to sample the fruit so that you can fill out [this contest submission form and fruit evaluation rubric](#) (including several photos). You will need to bring a camera, a tape measure or ruler, and a damp cloth or paper towel (see 3b) and will be asked to describe where the tree is growing, comment on the health of the tree, and collect information about fruit size, taste, and abundance. In case you want to bring a print copy of the form with you, you can print a hard copy [from this link](#).

Step 3b Genetic Testing: While visiting the tree, collect a leaf sample off of the tip of a branch by cutting a short section of a twig with several leaves attached and then wrapping it in a moist paper towel (the newer/younger the growth the better). This sample can be stored by sticking the cut end of the twig in a cup of water and placing it in the refrigerator until you are ready to mail it to the lab. We only have funding to pay for 100 tests, so we request that you allow us to look over the submitted pictures so that we can corroborate your identification. We will then email you the address of the lab and mailing instructions for free genetic testing. You can of course wait to collect the sample until you receive this email and this will provide the freshest sample for testing.

To participate in the contest, entries must be mailed by July 15th, 2022. If we reach our limit of 100 tests before that period we may close the contest early.

Step 5: After reviewing all submissions and then sharing testing results with entrants, we will then make final evaluations in August and send the entrants of the 10 most promising trees \$200 in exchange for their time and for mailing us 10 dormant cuttings over the winter.

Step 6: We will publish and share our findings and help people interested in finding *Morus rubra* propagation material connect with contest participants who want to sell or share cuttings or seeds.

If you have any questions please reach out to westonlombard@gmail.com or post on the Facebook event page.

Thank you for your assistance,

Sincerely,

The SARE Mulberry Grant Team

Helpful links:

[Mulberry Identification Guides](#)

[Contest Submission Form/Fruit Evaluation Rubric](#)

Facebook Contest Event Page

[Our full SARE Grant Proposal](#)