

Our State Tree

Since our main topic is about Oak savannas I thought I would include some information on our state tree, which happens to be the White Oak.

Quercus alba, the **White Oak**, is one of the pre-eminent hardwoods of eastern North America. It is a long-lived oak in the family Fagaceae, native to eastern North America, from southern Quebec west to eastern Minnesota, and south to northern Florida and eastern Texas. Specimens are known to have lived over 600 years.

Although called the white oak it is very unusual to find an individual with white bark; the usual color is an ashen gray. In the forest it reaches a magnificent height. In the open it develops into a massive broad-topped tree with great limbs striking out at wide angles.

Normally not a very tall tree, typically 65-85 feet (19.5-25.5 m) tall at maturity, it nonetheless becomes quite massive and its lower branches are apt to reach far out laterally parallel to the ground. The tallest known white oak is 144 feet (43 m) tall. It is not unusual for a white oak tree to be as wide as it is tall. Conversely, specimens at high altitude may only be small shrubs. White oaks have been known to live up to eight hundred years. The bark is a light ash-gray and somewhat peeling, variously from the top, bottom and/or sides.

In spring the young leaves are exquisite in their delicate silvery pink, covered with soft down as with a blanket. The petioles are short, and the leaves which cluster close to the ends of the shoots are pale green and downy with the result that the entire tree has a misty, frosty look which is very beautiful. This lovely vision continues for several days passing through the opalescent changes of soft pink, silvery white and finally yellow green.

The leaves grow to 5-8.5 in long and 2.75-4.5 in broad, with a deep glossy green upper surface. The leaves usually turn red or brown in autumn, but depending on climate, site, and individual tree genetics, some trees are nearly always red, or even

purple in autumn, others turn straight to a brown. Some brown, dead leaves may remain on the tree throughout winter until very early spring. They are variably lobed; sometimes the lobes are shallow, extending less than half-way to the midrib, but sometimes they are deeply lobed, with the lobes somewhat branching. The acorns are usually sessile, and grow to .5-1 in long, falling in early October.



The Old Charter Oak

- **Bark:** Light gray, varying to dark gray and to white; shallow fissured and scaly. Branchlets at first bright green, later reddish-green and finally light gray. A very distinguishing feature of this tree is that a little over half way up the tree the bark tends to become platy, that is that it looks sort of like overlapping scales that are easy to see and make this tree easy to identify.
- **Wood:** Light brown with paler sapwood; strong, tough, heavy, fine-grained, durable and beautiful. Sp. gr., 0.7470; weight of cu. ft., 46.35 lbs.
- **Winter buds:** Reddish brown, obtuse, one-eighth of an inch long.
- **Leaves:** Alternate, five to nine inches long, three to four inches wide. Obovate or oblong, seven to nine-lobed, usually seven-lobed with rounded lobes and rounded sinuses; lobes destitute of bristles; sinuses sometimes deep, sometimes shallow.
- **Acorns:** Annual, sessile or stalked; nut ovoid or oblong, round at the apex, light brown, shining, three-quarters to an inch long; cup cup-shaped, encloses about one-fourth of the nut.

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