

Quercus austrina Bluff Oak¹

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INTRODUCTION

This North American native oak reaches 30 to 80 feet in height and makes an attractive shade tree, with handsome scaly gray bark (Fig. 1). The green, lobed leaves are deciduous but do not change color before dropping in fall. The insignificant, green, spring flowers are followed by small acorns, less than one-inch-long. The trunk often grows straight up through the crown with little pruning, and branches are well spaced along the trunk. This is one of the oaks which is not currently available in most nurseries, but it should be. Urban tree managers will want this oak once they find out about it.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Quercus austrina*

Pronunciation: KWERK-us oss-TRY-nuh

Common name(s): Bluff Oak

Family: *Fagaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 8 through 9 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; reclamation plant; shade tree; specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

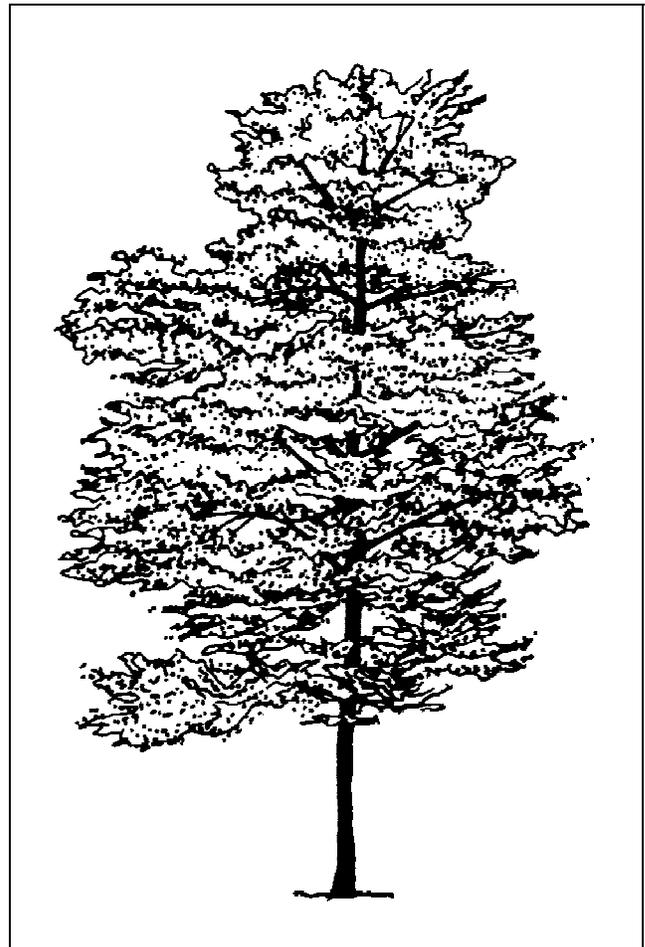


Figure 1. Middle-aged Bluff Oak.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 40 to 60 feet

Spread: 35 to 50 feet

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: oval; round

Crown density: open

Growth rate: medium

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: lobed; entire

Leaf shape: obovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: copper; orange; yellow

Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: brown

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval; round

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: attracts squirrels and other mammals; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown; green

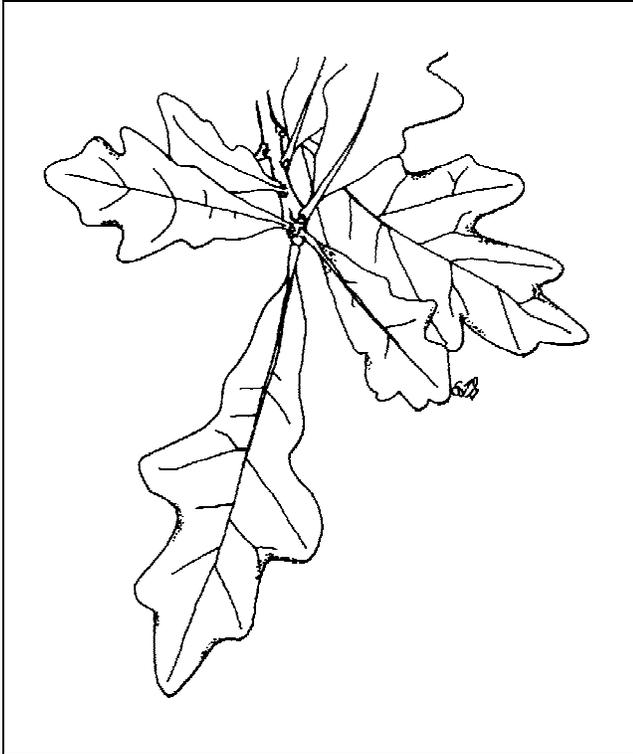


Figure 3. Foliage of Bluff Oak.

Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: not known to be susceptible

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

It would be well suited for planting in parking lots or along streets and boulevards where there is plenty of space for crown development. A row of Bluff Oaks planted on 30 foot centers lining each side of a street make a wonderful site. The medium-textured leaves

make this oak stand out from other oaks. Upright to horizontal branching habit make this an easy tree to prune for vehicular clearance beneath the canopy.

Bluff Oak should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil, and has good drought-tolerance.

Quercus durandii var. *austrina* is a synonym.

Propagation is by seed.

Pest and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.