Quercus austrina
Bluff Oak

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

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: KWARK-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

DESCRIPTION

Height: 40 to 60 feet
Spread: 35 to 50 feet

Figure 1. Middle-aged Bluff Oak.

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-542, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.

2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.
**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

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*Figure 2.* Shaded area represents potential planting range.
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

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.