

Quercus alba

[Synonyms : *Quercus alba* var. *subcaerulea*, *Quercus alba* var. *subflavea*, *Quercus* x *jackiana*]
AMERICAN OAK is a deciduous tree. Native to eastern North America it has leaves that turn purplish-crimson in Autumn.

It is also known as American white oak, Arizona oak, Arizona white oak, *Chêne blanc* (French-Canadian), *Dub bílý* (Czech), Forked-leaf white oak, Louisiana white oak, Mantua oak, Quebec oak, Ridge white oak, Stave oak, Stone oak, Tanner's oak, True white oak, West Virginia soft white oak, and White oak; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of independence.

Alba means 'white'.

The tree provided food for several North American Indian tribes, including the Iroquois. The acorns were a staple part of the Menominee diet. They used them to make puddings, and like the Meskwaki tribe they also made them into a kind of porridge. While some of the Chippewa Indians made an acorn soup, Meskwaki Indians also used the acorns to prepare a kind of coffee.

Cherokee Indians obtained some of their material for basketry from the American oak – and they also used its wood for construction (as did some of the Chippewa) and for making cooking tools and furniture. They also burnt it for fuel. Some of the Chippewa tribe made agricultural tools with the wood.

Both the Iroquois and Mohican Indian tribes employed the bark as a medicine for their horses (the former for curing distemper and the latter for easing pain).

As a source of human medicine the tree seems to have attracted the respect of many North American Indian tribes including the Menominee. It provided a Meskwaki remedy for some lung disorders, and the Iroquois used it for treating tuberculosis. Delaware Indians turned to it for some female problems, coughs and sore throats. The Cherokee tribe valued it for treating fever, dysentery, asthma, indigestion, urinary ailments, some oral problems and hoarseness – and they also used the bark to cause vomiting when this was necessary. Some of the Delaware Indians and the Cherokee tribe applied it to skin disorders and also took it as a tonic. It provided a pain treatment for both the Mohican and Shinnecock tribes, and the former also used it to ease colds. Piles were treated with it by the Penobscot and Micmac tribes, while some of the Chippewa Indians and also the Meskwaki used it to ease diarrhoea. For the Houma and the Mohican Indians American oak offered a remedy for rheumatism.

Its strong and heavy wood has been used by coopers (its use for wine and whiskey barrels led to one of its names Stave oak) and wheelwrights. This hard and durable wood has also been used for making railway sleepers, agricultural implements, dams and vehicles. American oak has been used for tanning too and has also been burnt as fuel. Apart from any of the foregoing it is used today for shipbuilding, construction, and furniture.

The acorns are hoarded by squirrels.

American oak is a state emblem for Connecticut, Illinois and Maryland in the United States and was adopted respectively in 1947, 1973 and 1941.

Medicinally, it has been used to treat diarrhoea, haemorrhages, sore throats, ulcers, venereal diseases and piles.

