

Quercus garryana

[Synonyms : *Quercus breweri*, *Quercus douglasii* var. *neaei*, *Quercus garryana* var. *breweri*, *Quercus garryana* var. *fruticosa*, *Quercus garryana* var. *jacobi*, *Quercus jacobi*, *Quercus lobata* var. *breweri*, *Quercus neaei*]

OREGON WHITE OAK is a deciduous tree. Native to western North America, it has glossy dark green leaves and very sweet-tasting, spiny-tipped, light yellowish-brown acorns. It is also known as Brewer oak, British Columbia oak, *Chêne de Garry* (French), *Chêne de l'Oregon* (French), Garry oak, Oak, *Oregon eik* (Dutch), *Oregoni tamm* (Estonian), *Oregoni tölgy* (Hungarian), Oregon oak, Pacific post oak, Pacific white oak, Post oak, Prairie oak, Scrub oak, Shin oak, Western oak, Western white oak, and White oak.

Warning – the pollen can present a hazard for hay fever sufferers.

This tree tolerates drought. Its durable, light brown to yellow wood, which is easy to split, can tend to warp. The flowers are pollinated by the wind.

Garryana commemorates an Englishman, Nicholas Garry (c. 1781-1856) who became Deputy-Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1822-1835 after his preceding supervision, as a director, of the amalgamation of the Company with the North West Company in 1821. This plant name is in recognition of the assistance he provided for plant collecting expeditions made by the Scottish botanist, David Douglas (1798-1834), especially those in the Pacific north-west. In actual fact his name has also been given to a genus, *Garrya*, and it crops up in some Canadian place names (especially in the west), including Fort Garry. Unfortunately his Deputy-Governorship came to a sad conclusion when in 1835 he began to lose his mind and from 1839 until his death in England his affairs had to be administered for him.

Quite a few North American Indian tribes found the Oregon white oak to be a useful source of food including the Nisqually and Karok tribes. (The acorns were boiled first, then eaten or ground for flour.) For the Shasta Indians its acorns were a staple part of their diet, and some of the Pomo tribe valued them sufficiently to harvest and store them for future use. Both of these tribes made the acorns into a kind of porridge – and they and the Mendocino Indians also made bread from them. The acorns were made into soup by the Shasta and Mendocino Indian tribes. The Squaxin and Chehalis Indians roasted them, both the Paiute and Cowlitz tribes ripened them before using them by burying them in mud, and the Salish Indians ate them cooked.

Cowlitz Indians made combs and digging tools from the wood (and also burnt it as fuel). Pomo Indians used the strong, tough wood to make their hunting arrows, and the Paiute tribe fashioned cooking tools out of it.

Although the wood can warp, it has been used in the past for shipbuilding, construction, flooring, building interiors and cooperage. It has also been burnt as fuel and used for making railway carriages, wagons, fence posts, insulator pins, woodenware, pallets, agricultural implements and furniture.

Although Oregon white oak wood is not used today as much as in the past, locally, it is still in demand for fence posts and is very much prized as fuel for domestic heating. Also authorities note that the tree can be a viable source of timber – although in some areas the shape of the tree and its branches can preclude its use on a commercial basis as the

volume of large pieces is relatively small. American experimentation around the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries into using this wood for casks in which wine is to be aged offers the possibility of an unusual outlet for it.

This oak provides food for many creatures. Deer browse on the foliage, especially the sprouts.

The acorns are enjoyed not only by deer, black bears, pigs, rodents (such as squirrels, chipmunks and mice) and domestic animals, but also by many birds including turkeys, quail, ducks, jays, woodpeckers, pigeons and doves. Livestock generally seem to browse happily on the foliage (although cattle can be poisoned if too much is eaten) and sheep and cattle also enjoy the acorns. (When harvests were heavy local ranchers used to gather the acorns and store them primarily for feeding hogs.) Wrens, warblers and titmice all make nests in Oregon white oaks.

It is recognised by environmentalists that the root system of these trees help to stabilise steep slopes. The tree is also cultivated for its shade and as an ornamental plant.

One fascinating piece of research carried out at the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries concerns truffles. It seems that greenhouse trials have indicated that the black truffle (*Tuber melanosporum*) found in France could grow happily in the vicinity of Oregon white oak. Investigations continue now to assess the practicability of managing stands of these oaks (similar to those in France) to produce this gourmet delicacy.

In British Columbia (Canada) Oregon white oak is the only oak native to that province and is viewed as an endangered species there – not least from the encroachment of urban areas.

Although it seems this oak has been introduced on several occasions to the British Isles authorities note that it seems not to grow beyond about 25 ft in height there.