

*Quercus ilex*

[Synonyms : *Quercus ballota*, *Quercus ilex* var. *ballota*, *Quercus ilex* var. *rotundifolia*, *Quercus rotundifolia*]

**EVERGREEN OAK** is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to the Mediterranean it has greyish-white catkins.

It is also known as *Azinhiera* (Portuguese), *Azinho* (Portuguese), *Ballut* (Maltese), *Carrasca* (Spanish), *Carvalho-cerequeiro* (Portuguese), *Chêne vert* (French), *Derwen Fythwyrdd* (Welsh), *Dub cesmínovítý* (Czech), *Dub cesmínový* (Czech), *Eiche* (German), *Encina* (Spanish), *Encino* (Spanish), Holly oak, Holly-leaved oak, Holm oak, Ilex, *Kverko verda* (Esperanto), *Leccio* (Italian), *Quercia leccio* (Italian), Round-leaved oak, *Stein-Eiche* (German), *Vert tchêne* (Channel Islander-Guernsey and Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), and *Yeuse* (French).

The flowers are pollinated by the wind.

*Ilex* is derived for some authorities from the genus name *Ilex* meaning ‘like plants in that (holly) genus with reference to their common evergreen nature and the prickly foliage of young plants of evergreen oak, and for others it is a Latin name for evergreen oak.

Like the cork oak (*Quercus suber*) the evergreen oak was once the source of a red dye as a cochineal insect will happily feed on these leaves (as much as the cochineal cactus, *Opuntia cochenillifera*) and was harvested for processing into the pigment.

The acorns have been fed to pigs. In contrast it would seem that black rhinoceroses view this tree’s foliage as a special delicacy. Chester Zoo wished to satisfy its residents’ desires and searched for a local source. In the process the Zoo approached Arley Hall in Cheshire and it is said that mutually acceptable arrangements were reached. (Apparently Arley Hall boasts an avenue of evergreen oaks – the only one in England.)

Acorns from the evergreen oak (unlike nearly all the other species in the genus) have also been used for human consumption (even today in poorer areas) for which they will be ground into flour.

This species is valued particularly for its very hard, durable wood that has been used for many centuries for shipbuilding and construction work, especially by the Romans. Its bark has been used both for charcoal and for tanning.

There are many examples that illustrate how local ecology can be seriously unbalanced when man has introduced an alien plant. Man is shown to be only one of the culprits in an example involving this tree. In this instance although an established dense colony of evergreen oaks clothing steep downland overlooking a town on the Isle of Wight off southern England (said to be the largest woodland of its kind in the Country) is valued for its land stabilizing qualities, the woodland itself is so shaded and the ground beneath so thick with leaves that other plant and animal life seem for the time being to be excluded. Except that is for some birds. When the acorns emerge rooks and jackdaws gather them and in due course deposit the fruit in great numbers on the valley floor below to the consternation of naturalists as the potential number that would germinate are more than sufficient to disrupt the local habitat. (A similar but warmer wood much further south in Majorca is understood to support at least five species of orchid.)