

Quercus stellata

[Synonyms : *Quercus alba* var. *minor*, *Quercus minor*, *Quercus mississippiensis*, *Quercus obtusiloba*, *Quercus stellata* var. *attenuata*, *Quercus stellata* var. *boyntonii*, *Quercus stellata* var. *mississippiensis*, *Quercus stellata* var. *palmeri*, *Quercus stellata* var. *parviloba*, *Quercus sinuata* var. *san-sabeana*, *Quercus stellata* var. *similis*, *Quercus villosa*]

POST OAK is a deciduous tree. Native to southern and eastern United States, it has dull or glossy dark green leaves and edible, sweet-tasting, spine-tipped, pale yellowish-brown acorns.

It is also known as American post oak, Barren white oak, Bastard oak, Bastard white oak, Bottomland post oak, Box oak, Box white oak, Boynton post oak, Branch oak, Brash oak, *Chêne à poteaux* (French), Cross oak, Delta post oak, Drummond post oak, Durand oak, Dwarf post oak, Iron oak, *Keresztkaréjú tölgy* (Hungarian), Mississippi Valley oak, Obtuse-lobed oak, Pin oak, Ridge oak, Rough oak, Rough white oak, Runner oak, Sandhill post oak, Sand post oak, Scrubby post oak, Southern oak, *Tähttam* (Estonian), Turkey oak, White box oak, White oak, and Yellow oak

The flowers are pollinated by the wind. The tree will tolerate drought. It attracts insects which produce galls.

Warning – the tannin in the foliage and leaves is sufficient to be poisonous for cattle, sheep and goats especially in the Spring or during periods of drought. (It is said that in parts of the Southern United States the annual cost of lost livestock has been significant and has reached more than \$10,000,000 dollars.)

The relatively small amount of post oak which is available on the commercial market is sold as ‘white oak’.

Stellata means ‘starry’ with reference to the minute hairs on the back of the leaves and on young twigs. The common name Post oak is believed to have emerged from the common use of this wood through the 18th, 19th, and early 20th Centuries for fence posts.

From records one is led to believe that post oak was very nearly the preserve of the North American Cherokee Indians. They used its wood for basketry and for making furniture, wagon wheels, railway sleepers and cooking tools – and they and the Kiowa burnt it as fuel. During their Peyote ceremonies Kiowa Indians smoked cigarettes with sleeves made from its leaves – especially if corn husks were not available.

The acorns were not only eaten, cooked and pounded into a meal, by the Kiowa and Gosiute tribes, but they were also ground and used to make a kind of coffee. Parts of the Chippewa tribe also ate the acorns and it is fairly certain that they actually processed them before cooking (by boiling them or steeping them in running water) to remove any trace of tannin.

As a source of medicine the tree served one or two North American Indian tribes besides the Cherokee. They and Creek Indians used it as a remedy for dysentery, and the Choctaw tribe took it for stomach upsets. But it may well have been the Cherokee who identified the most medicinal uses for the plant as (apart from dysentery) they prescribed it for treating fever, asthma, urinary problems, indigestion, hoarseness, oral sores and skin disorders.

This strong wood was used in the past for cooperage, pit-props, flooring, and, occasionally, construction. It was also chosen for agricultural implements, fencing, railway sleepers and furniture. The wood has also been used for veneering, boarding and building interiors, and has been burnt as fuel.

The galls have been used for tanning. They were once an important and major source of black ink. This liquid (the ink) was also used for dyeing.

In 1960 concern arose that the tree was invading valuable grazing areas in western and south-western regions of the United States sufficiently for recommendations to be made that drastic eradication methods be considered.

Post oak was introduced to Britain in 1800 by John Fraser (1750-1811), a Scottish collector who specialised in North American plants.

The tree is cultivated as a shade tree and its bark has been used as a decorative feature in landscaping (as well as a mulch). It has also been included in reclamation programmes.

The acorns are enjoyed by much wildlife, especially deer, bears, wild turkeys, jays and quail, as well as squirrels and other rodents. Livestock, apart from sheep, cattle and goats, also eat them and will browse on the foliage too. (Early settlers in America fed their pigs on the acorns.)

Medicinally, galls were once used for the treatment of diarrhoea, dysentery and haemorrhaging.