

Quercus virginiana

[Synonyms : *Quercus andromeda*, *Quercus geminata*, *Quercus maritima*, *Quercus oleoides* var. *quaterna*, *Quercus phellos* var. *obtusifolia*, *Quercus phellos* var. *sempervirens*, *Quercus sempervirens*, *Quercus succulenta*, *Quercus virginiana* var. *eximea*, *Quercus virginiana* var. *maritima*, *Quercus virens*]

LIVE OAK is an evergreen or semi-evergreen shrub or tree. Native to south-eastern United States, it has glossy dark green leaves and sweet-tasting, shiny dark brown acorns.

It is also known as Bay live oak, *Chêne de Virginie* (French), Coastal live oak, Coast live oak, Dwarf live oak, Encino, Escarpment live oak, Green quercus, Plateau live oak, Plateau oak, Rolfs oak, Sand live oak, Scrub live oak, Southern live oak, *Stedsegrøn pile-eg* (Danish), Texas live oak, *Virginiai tölgy* (Hungarian), Virginia live oak, Virginia oak, *Virgiinia tamm* (Estonian), and West Texas live oak

The flowers are pollinated by the wind.

The tree tolerates drought and salt spray.

Virginiana means 'of Virginia (United States)' which itself was named after the English 'Virgin Queen' Elizabeth I (1533-1603). Some say this tree attracted the common name Live oak because its leaves persist through Winter – and they only drop in the Spring as new growth appears.

According to some authorities few North American Indian tribes ate the narrowly top-shaped, spine-tipped acorns. Yet others note that the Mahuna tribe made them into a porridge which they enjoyed both as a pudding and as an accompaniment for deer meat. Other tribes used them in other ways for instance for thickening venison soup or extracting an oil from them equivalent to olive oil or a poor quality almond oil. Then the Seminole tribe are said to have fed the acorns to their pigs as fodder.

Mahuna Indians used the thick, normally grey-whitish woolly beneath leaves for bedding, and the blackish-brown bark was used as a dyeing ingredient for black, brown, grey, red, white and yellow dyes that were applied to buckskin. The Choctaw tribe made a red paint with the bark, and the Houma Indians also used it to obtain a red dye for their baskets. It was the Seminole tribe who seem to have found the most varied uses for the plant. They not only used it for tanning and preparing a cleaning agent but they also made the wood into cane mills and pestles, and burnt it as fuel. Some authorities also believe that live oak saplings were sometimes staked down so that they would grow at an outlandish angle and provide trail markers.

Live oak would appear to have provided medicine for a few North American tribes including the Mahuna. The Seminole Indians used it to treat piles, rheumatism, skin disorders and wounds, while the Houma tribe turned to it for a cure for dysentery.

The bark has been used for tanning on a relatively small scale commercially.

This tough, extremely heavy wood is said to be so hard that it is very difficult to work and some authorities note has been used seldom commercially at the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries. In the past in contrast records show that before iron superseded wood it was considered to be extremely important as a ship-building timber in the United States (well established as such by at least 1700) and the arching branches were prized for making ships' ribs, knees and hulls. Respect for this wood's durable qualities was such that

Congress even enacted laws to ensure a secure supply. In fact live oak forests were the Country's first publicly owned timber lands by as early as 1799, bought for her Navy's shipyards. It was also used to make hubs and cogs. (Much later, in the 1970s apparently, this wood was in short supply.) The wood has been considered an extremely good source of fuel.

In the wild these trees are often festooned with Florida moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) and other air plants and orchids – and they can also be seen planted in avenues in the south-eastern United States. These trees, which are often viewed by Americans as a symbol of the 'Old South', are cultivated for shade and as an ornamental in many North American cities, in parks, streets and private gardens. They have also been included in reforestation programmes, especially to counter soil erosion.

The state of Georgia in the United States adopted the live oak as a state emblem in 1937. Acorns are eaten by bears, deer and squirrels and birds, such as wild turkeys, jays, quail, woodpeckers and ducks.

Medicinally, wood vinegar (made by condensing smoke from the burning wood) has been recommended for improving blood circulation.