

FEBRUARY 2019

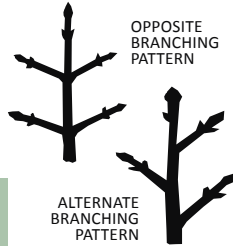


TREE OF THE MONTH

Swamp White Oak • *Quercus bicolor*

ALSO KNOWN AS: SWAMP OAK

Swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*) is a deciduous tree with a broad, irregular crown and an alternate branching pattern. They can grow up to 100 feet tall and live over 300 years. As its name suggests, swamp white oak is native to the lowlands, floodplains, and valleys of the northeast and central United States.



Swamp white oaks provide habitat for birds and small mammals.

Swamp white oak fruits, acorns, are an important food source for many species including squirrels, mice, deer, beaver, black bear, wood ducks, turkeys, and song birds.

Like all oaks, swamp white oaks are part of the beech family (Fagaceae). Beech family trees are notable in winter because they sometimes hold on to their dried, brown leaves even until spring in the northeast.

Leaves are typically lobed with shallow sinuses (indentations along the margin) although the sinuses can be deep on some leaves, especially close to the stem. Topsides of the leaves are shiny, dark green while undersides are whitish and finely haired. The two-toned leaves lend the tree its latin epithet, *bicolor*, meaning two colors. Leaves turn yellow in fall, sometimes reddish purple, and can persist through winter in their dried, brown form.

Bark is a thick gray-brown with flat-topped ridges. On mature trees bark peels off in curls and becomes scaly as well as ridged.

Swamp white oaks are monoecious, meaning that they bear both male and female flowers on the same tree. Oak blooms are on catkins, long spikes of flowers, and swamp white oaks have male and female catkins. In the northeast they bloom from May to June and fruits, acorns, fully develop from August through October.

Easily confused with eastern white oak (*Quercus alba*) and burr oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*).

Swamp white oaks have been used by many Native American peoples for both medicinal and textile purposes. The galls can be used for their tannins to dye textiles and leather. The Iroquois also used galls to treat hemorrhages, chronic diarrhea, and dysentery.

Swamp white oak are especially prone to a large number of diseases and insect pests such as canker, leaf spot, blight, galls, caterpillars, leaf miners and oak mite.

Here in the Berkshires, the historic gardens at Naumkeag estate in Stockbridge feature a swamp white oak over 200 years old. This tree was so beloved by the Choate family who built the estate that the initial architect was sacked because his design called for the tree's demise.

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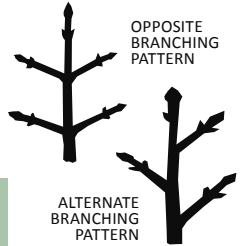


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Bonn del.

Gabriel Sc.

QUERCUS P^{us} Discolor.
Swamp White Oak.



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