

Swamp White Oak

Quercus bicolor

Common name:
Swamp White Oak

Pronunciation:
KWER-kus BI-kul-er

Family:
Fagaceae
Genus:
Quercus

"As you tramp the woods with stick and dog, or even when you are rushing along, high over valleys and among mountain peaks, one Oak proclaims its unmistakable identity at a glance and at a distance. At least it does so if there is any free wind plowing through the summer foliage, for on the slightest provocation this beauty among the Oaks shows its white flounced petticoats -- the silvery undersides of the blades which contrast so markedly with the upper surface."

(excerpt from Donald Culross Peattie, *A Natural History of Trees on Eastern and Central North America*)

Quick ID Tips:

- Large 4-9" leaves are dark green on the upper surface and have numerous small pointed or rounded lobes
- Leaves have conspicuously pale, nearly white undersides
- Bark on older Swamp White Oak is deeply furrowed, blocky, and has broad, flat ridges
- Strongly prefer moist to wet habitat

Details:

- This medium-sized deciduous tree grows to 75 ft. tall and is pyramidal when young. When mature, it has an open, rounded crown and relatively short trunk.
- This tree is only occasionally found in our northern New England areas but will become more prevalent as the climate warms in New England.
- Bark is very thick and light grayish-brown, scaly, and irregularly and deeply furrowed into broad, flat ridges with age.
- Leaves are alternate, simple, 4-9" long, 2-4" wide and widest above the middle, tapering to a wedge-shape base. The leaf has multiple, rounded shallow lobes

and is glossy green above, and conspicuously gray or almost white and pubescent below.

- Fruit (acorns) are 3/4 to 1" long, solitary or in pairs, with long thin stalks up to 1/2". The acorn has a deep and slightly fringed cup covered with swollen scales and enclosing one-third to one-half of the nut.
- The acorns are sweet and provide food for wild turkey, squirrels, deer, duck, and other animals that live in and near wetlands.
- Tolerates full sun to part shade and strongly prefers moist, well-drained, acid soils found in wet woods and swamps, bottomlands, and floodplains.
- Hardy in USDA Zones 4-8. The native range extends from Quebec, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania west to southern Wisconsin and Michigan and south to Tennessee and northern Georgia.
- *bicolor*: two-colored, a reference to the contrast between the upper and lower leaf surfaces.



plant habit, summer



leaves



pale leaf undersides



developing acorn



mature acorn



trunk, bark



older trunk, bark



winter bud

Sources:

- Oregon State University Landscape Plants, <https://landscapeplants.oregonstate.edu/plants/quercus-bicolor>
- Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quercus_bicolor
- Charles Fergus, *Trees of New England, A Natural History* (Globe Pequot Press 2005)
- David Sibley, *The Sibley Guide to Trees* (Knopf 2009)