

Quercus austrina: Bluff Oak¹

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Introduction

This North American native oak reaches 40 to 60 feet in height and makes an attractive shade tree, with handsome scaly gray bark. The green, lobed leaves are deciduous but do not change color before dropping in fall. The insignificant, green, spring flowers are followed by small acorns, less than one-inch-long. The trunk often grows straight up through the crown with little pruning, and branches are well spaced along the trunk. This is one of the oaks which is not currently available in most nurseries, but it should be. Urban tree managers will want this oak once they find out about it.

General Information

Scientific name: Quercus austrina

Pronunciation: KWERK-us oss-TRY-nuh

Common name(s): Bluff oak

Family: Fagaceae

USDA hardiness zones: 8A through 9B (Figure 2) **Origin:** native to Atlantic and Gulf coastal states from southern Mississippi to southeastern North Carolina

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: native

Uses: reclamation; street without sidewalk; shade; specimen; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median

highway median



Figure 1. Full Form—Quercus austrina: bluff oak

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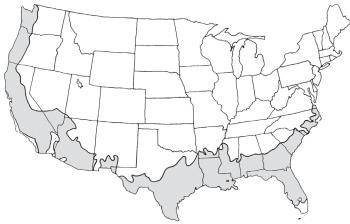


Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 40 to 60 feet **Spread:** 35 to 50 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: oval, round
Crown density: open
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: lobed, entire Leaf shape: obovate Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous **Leaf blade length:** 1 to 6 inches

Leaf color: dark green and shiny on top, paler green

underneath

Fall color: copper, yellow, orange **Fall characteristic:** showy



Figure 3. Leaf—Quercus austrina: bluff oak

Flower

Flower color: brown

Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round, oval; oblong

Fruit length: ½ to ¾ inch

Fruit covering: dry or hard acorn; cap has tight brown scales, is bowl-shaped, and covers the top $\frac{1}{3}-\frac{1}{2}$ of the shiny

nut

Fruit color: tan or brown

Fruit characteristics: attracts squirrels/mammals; not

showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Fruiting: mid to late fall

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches don't droop; showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

Bark: whitish, scaly from about 1/3 of the way up the trunk

and above, and with broad ridges **Pruning requirement:** little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green, brown Current year twig thickness: medium Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 4. Bark—*Quercus austrina*: bluff oak Credits: Gitta Hasing

Culture

Light requirement: full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: unknown

Other

Roots: not a problem Winter interest: yes Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant **Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

It would be well suited for planting in parking lots or along streets and boulevards where there is plenty of space for crown development. A row of bluff oaks planted on 30-foot centers lining each side of a street make a wonderful site. The medium-textured leaves make this oak stand out from other oaks. Upright to horizontal branching habit make this an easy tree to prune for vehicular clearance beneath the canopy.

Bluff oak should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil, and has good drought-tolerance.

Quercus durandii var. austrina is a synonym.

Propagation is by seed.

Pest and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

Reference

Koeser, A. K., Hasing, G., Friedman, M. H., and Irving, R. B. 2015. Trees: North & Central Florida. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.