

Technical Report



Wetland Flora

No. 00-9 / September 2000

Gene Silberhorn

Basket Oak Swamp Chestnut Oak

Quercus michauxii Nutt.

Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

Basket oak can be a large tree, growing up to 100 feet tall with light gray, flaky bark when mature. The first branch of older trees may be 30 to 40 feet above the ground. The bark is similar to white oak (*Quercus alba*). Leaves are simple, alternate, deciduous, with up to 15 rounded, shallow lobes on one side of the blade. White oak has fewer, deeper lobes which extend halfway to the midrib of the blade. Leaves, especially when young, have a soft, velvety feel because of dense whitish hairs (tomentose) underneath the blade. Chestnut oak (*Q. prinus*), a similar oak of drier upland conditions, has nearly identical leaves, but are not tomentose underneath at maturity and the bark is darker gray and not flaky. The cup of the acorn is dark brown, scaly, hairy and covers about one third of the tan colored nut. Thin strips of the wood were apparently used for basket making in pioneer days, hence the name basket oak.

Distribution

Basket oak is a southern oak ranging from northern Florida to New Jersey along the Atlantic Coastal Plain and north to southern Indiana in the Mississippi Watershed. *Quercus michauxii* is uncommon to rare in the northern part of its range.

Habitat

Basket oak is one of the more common oaks that are found along coastal plain riverine or riparian wetlands and coastal nonriverine hardwood mineral flats. On river or small stream bottoms, *Q. michauxii* may be associated with river birch (*Betula nigra*), Wetland Flora No.97-1, January 1997; ironwood (*Carpinus caroliniana*) Wetland Flora No.97-2, March 1997; sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) Wetland Flora No.94-1, January 1994, green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) Wetland Flora No.94-4, May 1994 and willow oak (*Quercus phellos*). In wooded flats it is often found with red maple (*Acer rubrum*) Wetland Flora No.91-7, July 1991, sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) Wetland Flora No.92-1, January 1992, black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) Wetland Flora No.97-7, September 1997, loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) Wetland Flora No.93-3 / March 1993, willow oak and cherrybark oak (*Quercus pogoda*).

Ecological Values/Benefits

Oak acorns are renowned wildlife food. Mast production is closely monitored by wildlife biologists and foresters.

Wetland Indicator Status

According to the *Draft Revision of The National List of Plant Species that Occur in Wetlands, 1997*, *Quercus michauxii* is classified as a **facultative wetland plant (FACW)**. FACW plants "usually occur in wetlands (estimated probability 67%-99%)."

Quercus michauxii Nutt.



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