

Quercus phellos

Willow Oak

Tried and True
Native Plant Selections
for the Mid-Atlantic

Although bottomlands are its natural home, this handsome, long-lived native* tree thrives in cultivated landscapes. Alexandria’s [Bicentennial Tree](#), a Willow Oak, dates back to about 1707. The National Park Service notes that *Quercus* supports more life forms than any other NA tree genus.



Tree	Summer & Fall Trees, Foliage, Catkins, Acorn
Height: 40–90 feet	 
Spread: 25–50 feet	
Bloom Color: Golden yellow to green	  
Characteristics	
Moderately fast-growing, monoecious , deciduous tree with densely-branched, oval to rounded crown	
Alternate , simple, pinnate , lanceolate to linear, smooth-margined, bristle-tipped leaves, ¼–1” wide by 2–5” long, shiny green above, paler below	
Yellowish, dangling, 2–3” male catkins ; spike of 2–3 female flowers near stem tips March to April	
½” round to ovoid acorn with shallow cupule topping striated brown nut , matures in 2nd year, Sep–Nov	
Fall foliage subtle golden to copper to brown	
Brown to gray bark , smooth with white lenticels when young, shallowly ridged and furrowed when mature; old trunks often fluted	
Attributes	
Tolerates salt, clay soil, occasional dry soil, flooding; can suffer wind damage, susceptible to acid rain	Excellent Replacement for Acer platanoides - Norway Maple Quercus acutissima - Sawtooth Oak Ulmus parviflora & U. pumila - Asian Elms *In the Mid-Atlantic, it is native to DC and common in the Coastal Plain of DE, MD, and VA (where it is also common in the Piedmont). It is present in PA's Coastal Plain. **It is unsafe to eat raw acorns. Tannins must be leached out first. Remove caps and shells from mature, thoroughly dried acorns. Boil or soak nuts in water. Discard brown water and repeat process until water is clear and bitterness is gone.
Good resistance to usual oak pests and diseases; deer occasionally severely damage saplings	
Acorns edible if properly processed;** toxic to horses	
Provides hard mast , cover, nesting sites; larval host for ~513 lepidopterans , incl. numerous hairstreaks	
Growing and Maintenance Tips	
Soil Requirements : Acidic, average, well-drained	
Light Requirements : Sun (preferred), Partial Shade	
Water Requirements : Moist, Wet	
Transplants well due to shallow, spreading roots	
Reliable, ample nut crop most years on 20+ year trees	
Use as ornamental/shade (large) lawn or street tree	
Hardiness : USDA Zones 5a–9b	
developed by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, serving Arlington and Alexandria	

Images by Elaine Mills (top left, middle) and Mary Free (top right, bottom), street trees, Arlington County, VA