

Learning about Nuttall Oak *Quercus nuttallii*

The Nuttall Oak (*Quercus nuttallii*) grows on bottomlands along the Gulf Coastal Plain. It grows well on heavy, poorly drained, clay soils deposited by rivers.

Characteristics. Nuttall Oaks grow to 60 to 80 feet in height and have a canopy of 35 to 50 feet. Their leaves, which are four to eight inches long and alternately arranged, have 5-9 lobes in the leaf margin. The veins on the leaf are pinnate. Nuttall Oaks are deciduous, which means that they drop their leaves in the fall. Their bark is gray or brown and relatively smooth to black and furrowed with flat scaly ridges.

Male flowers appear at the time of leaf flushing in March and April with female flowers appearing about 10 to 14 days later. The acorns form, ripen and fall from September to February of the second year. A Nuttall Oak tree must be approximately 20 years old before producing acorns.

Fruit. The acorns are oblong, brown, $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and covered by a $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch cap. They ripen and fall from September to February of the second year. Nuttall Oak seeds require about three months of cold [stratification] in order to germinate. They germinate in the spring when soil temperatures warm to above 70° F. Seed germination averages 60 to 90 percent but germination varies by size and may be reduced by acorn weevil damage. Larger acorns have somewhat higher germination rates than smaller ones.

Geographic Range. The native range of the Nuttall Oak is along the Gulf Coastal Plain from Florida west to southeastern Texas. North of the Mississippi Valley it is found in Arkansas, southeastern Missouri, and western Tennessee.

Additional Information.

- Nuttall Oak is also called red oak, Red River oak, Texas red oak and pin oak. It is most often confused with pin oak (*Q. palustris*).
- Nuttall Oak grows rapidly, reaching an average height of 13.4 feet within five years.
- Its acorns are eaten by ducks, squirrels, deer, black bears and turkeys.
- Nuttall Oak leaves turn red in the fall.

References:

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