

July Guess that Plant



There were many guesses on this oak, yet no one correctly identified the tree. I said it was a difficult one and a perfect example why leaves on oaks are not the only characteristic that need to be checked to make a proper identification.

July's "**Guess This Plant**" was **Southern Red Oak or Spanish Oak, *Quercus falcata* Michx.** This tree is a native forest component for the Atlantic Coastal edge from Monmouth County south and throughout the interior of Southern New Jersey, specifically of the gravel formations such as the Pennsauken, Bridgeton and Cape May. It is characteristic of New Jersey's mixed oak forests and is found in uplands. Mary Hough (1983) lists the tree for all of the southern counties. It is more common south of the Mullica River where fire is less and the forests tend to be oak dominated.

One of its characteristic traits is the highly variable leaf forms. The leaves range between highly dissected specimens similar to scarlet oak to the form used this month. The form used in this month's quiz was a three lobed form similar to Black Jack Oak, *Quercus marlandica*. Unlike Black Jack, Southern Red Oak has off set (falcate) leaf margins where the blade meets the stem. The Southern Red Oak leaf is thin with a white under side whereas the Black Jack oak's leaf is leathery and red-orange hairy on it's under side. Both can achieve heights into the canopy, yet most know Black Jack as a small dwarfed tree on poor sandy soils. Southern red oak is large, full size tree with the form and character of Black Oak (*Quercus velutina*). This tree is in the black oak group. It appears to be holding its own during the recent onslaught of diseases such as bacteria leaf scorch and general oak wilt.