

March 2022 Plant of the Month



Quercus stellata Wangenh; Post Oak

March's *Plant of the Month* is Post Oak, a common tree found throughout most of New Jersey. Post Oak is a member of the Fagaceae, the Beech family. The oak genus along with beech and chestnut provide indispensable framework for forest canopies throughout the temperate world. Our species, Post oak, is a member of the white oak tribe, and is similar in general appearance to the common white oak. It differs by leaf shape, texture, and its tolerance to frequent fire. Post oak is found from Massachusetts west to Missouri, and south to the Southern Coastal Plain, where it is an abundant tree. Mary Hough (1983) cites voucher specimens from most counties with the exception of the interior Highlands. This species is more frequent on the Outer Coastal Plain, where it is an integral part of the canopy in pine-oak forests and landscapes with a severe fire history. The species is an obligate upland tree with little tolerance of saturated soils.

Post oak has been used for its acorns, durable wood, and shelter. Wildlife, such as white tailed deer, wild turkey, gray squirrel, the abundant smaller rodents such as woodland mice and voles all use post oak acorns. The tree provides cavities used by nesting birds and arboreal rodents such as southern flying squirrel and gray squirrel. The wood has a durable property, hence the name post oak for its use as fence posts. Moerman (1998) cites a general widespread Native American use as a drug, food, and fiber. Our monthly species "flowers" when its catkins emerge in May, and the acorn is mature by September. The species is dormant as this profile is written, but it can be seen by identifying the cast leaves from last fall and its almost white oak bark.