

March 2024 Plant of the Month



Quercus ilicifolia Wang., Bear or Scrub Oak

March's *Plant of the Month* is a common species often associated with the Pine Barrens. Bear or scrub oak, *Quercus ilicifolia*, is a shrubby member of the Beech family, Fagaceae. It is one of two shrub species of *Quercus* native to the State. The other species dwarf chestnut oak, *Quercus prinoides*, which is often found together with our Plant of the Month. Hough (1983) cites a state-wide distribution, with concentrations in the Pine Barrens as well as on the Kittatinny

As its name suggests, shrub oak is a short stature shrub that is found on nutrient poor, drought-prone soils. This shrub is a major constituent of the Pine Barrens upland forests, where it occupies a significant part of the upland landscape where Cohansey Sand and Beacon Hill Gravels are exposed. Scrub oak is also a fire tolerant species and is one of the many Pinelands species adapted to this land shaping characteristic.

The cultural use of scrub oak is limited. It has few wood-oriented benefits, but is a species suitable for xeric landscape restoration. Moerman (1998) cites an Iroquois use as a gynecological aid. Apparently its acorn is too bitter to use as a prime food source. Bear or scrub oak is visible year round in the uplands of the Pine Barrens as well on top of Kittatinny Mountain.

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