
OAKS AT THE MORTON ARBORETUM, PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE

by Peter van der Linden

Oaks are nothing new at the Morton Arboretum; in fact, they were an important feature of the landscape here long before Joy Morton founded the Arboretum in 1922. At the time of Euro-American settlement, oaks were the dominant trees in local savannas and woodlands. Spontaneous oaks are still common throughout the Arboretum.

Here in the Chicago region, nine oak species are native. Three are especially widespread and common: bur oak, *Q. macrocarpa*; white oak, *Q. alba*; and Northern red oak, *Q. rubra* (*Q. borealis maxima*). Other native species are *Q. bicolor*, *Q. muhlenbergii*, *Q. ellipsoidalis*, *Q. palustris*, *Q. velutina*, and *Q. imbricaria*.

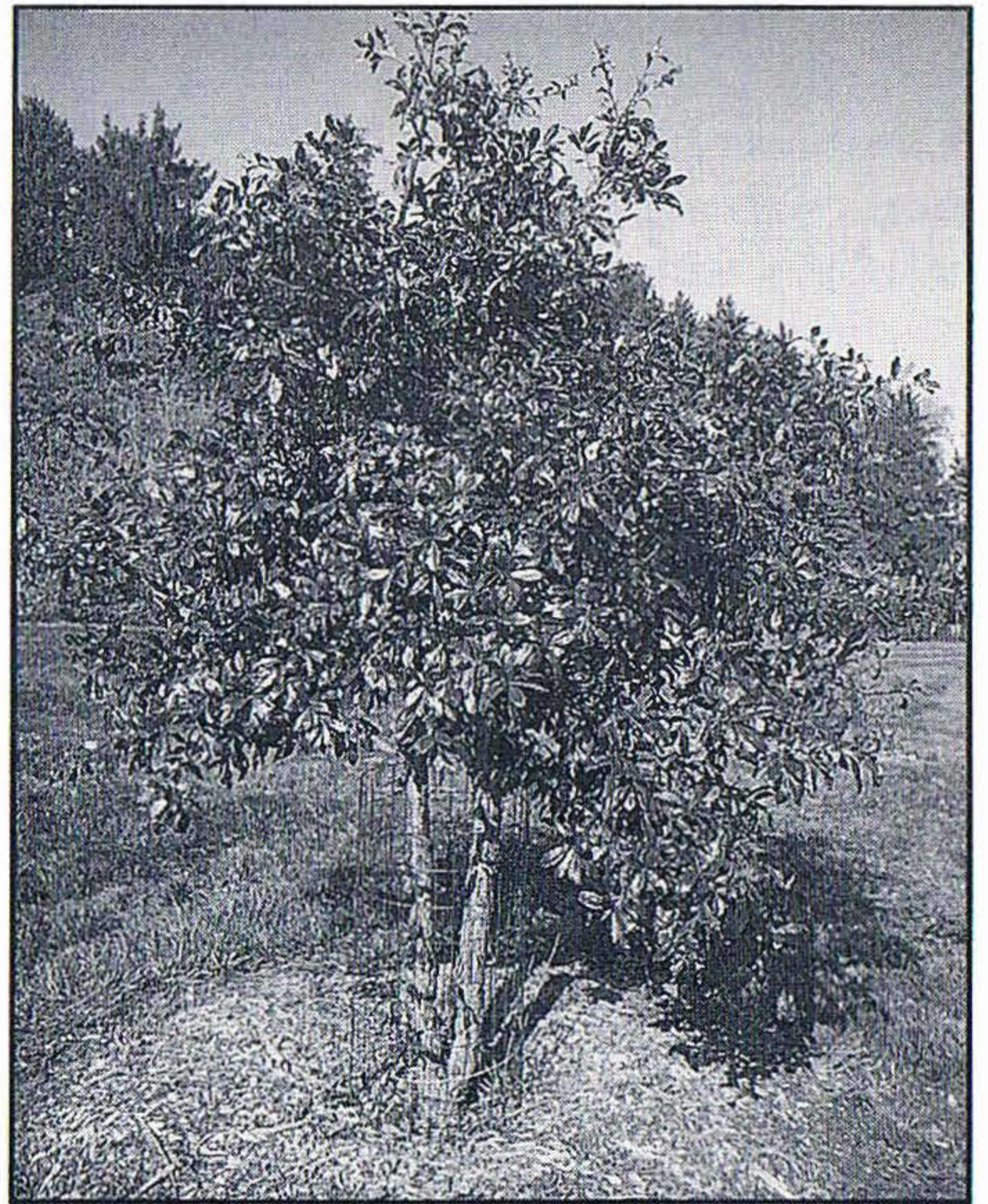
Native and exotic oaks were acquired for our collections from the very beginning. The oldest planted oaks on the grounds include *Q. coccinea* and *Q. dentata*, acquired in 1922.

The Arboretum's first collection of oaks was planted in a former savanna called King's Grove Woods. This area is no longer maintained and has reverted to forest. We have records for one accession that remains of *Q. bicolor*.

Later, in 1936, a second collection was started on the Arboretum's far east side. This collection, called the *Quercus* Collection, is still being maintained. It contains 27 taxa, mostly acquired from cultivated sources, plus several cultivars. Notable among the trees are several hybrid oaks, including *Quercus* x *jackianna*, a hybrid of *Q. alba* and *Q. bicolor*.

Planting in this collection ended in 1980, when a new collection, the Fagaceae, was started on the Arboretum's west side. At present it contains 19 species. Reflecting the Arboretum's current emphasis on wild-type plants, most of the trees were grown from seed collected from natural populations. Because of the difficulty in acquiring viable acorns from overseas, most of the plants in this collection are native species, collected locally.

Among the introduced species are three small trees of *Q. oglethorpensis*, which has proved surprisingly hardy, considering its South Carolina provenance. Our newest acquisition is *Q. liaotungensis*, grown from seed that we collected in 1990 from the Pangquangou Preserve in Shanxi Province, China.



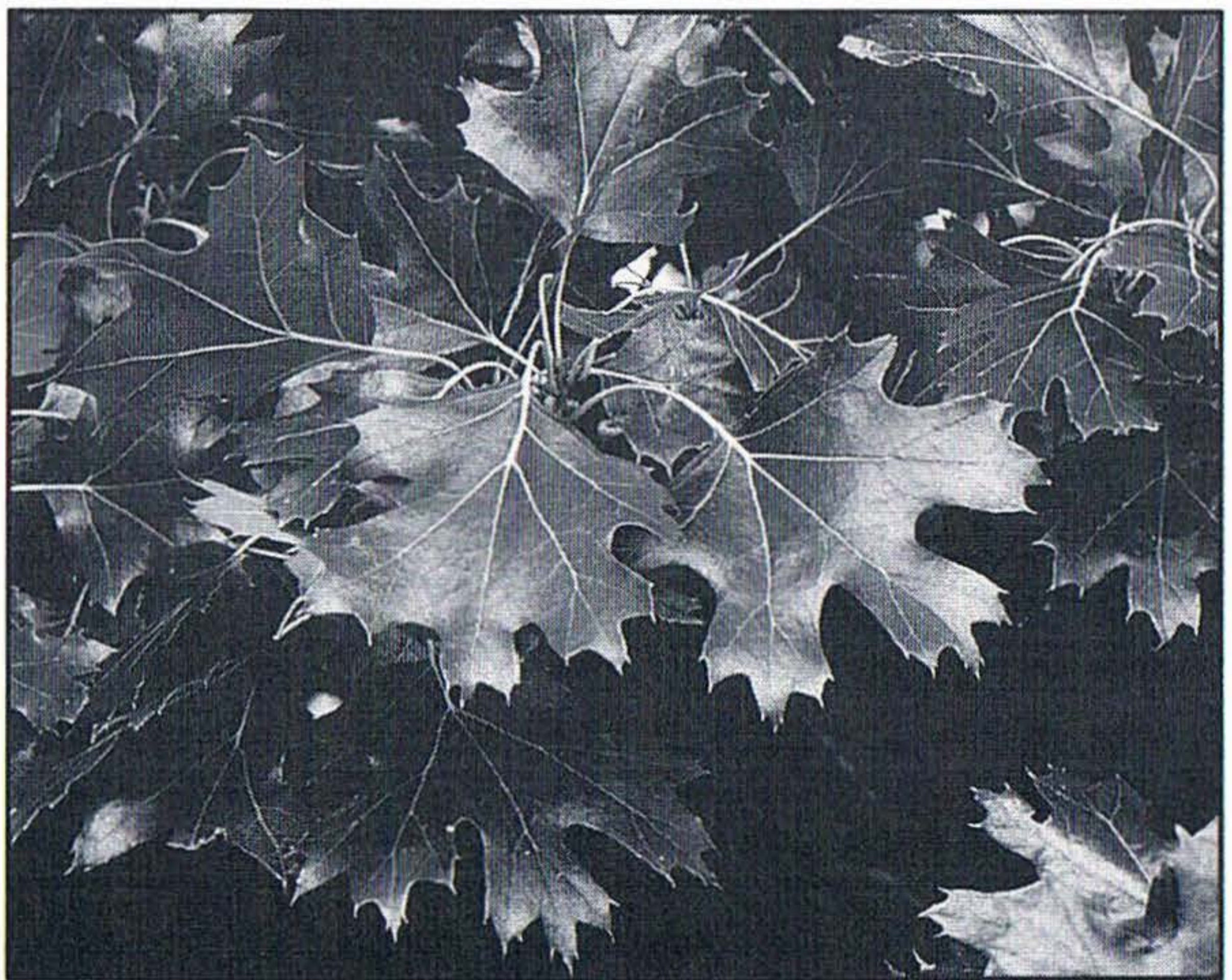
Quercus oglethorpensis Specimen at The Morton Arboretum, Lisle, Illinois, USA. M.Nigel Wright



Quercus oglethorpensis Leaf Detail. M.Nigel Wright

The two collections I have just described -- *Quercus* and *Fagacae* -- are the best places to see oaks in our collections. Oaks also can be found in many other places at the Arboretum, including the north side of Meadow Lake and in our geographic collections.

One of our prize specimens, *Q. acerifolia*, is located in our *Malus* collection. This rare and unusual tree, with its distinctive maple-like leaves, is endemic to the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. It was originally described as *Q. shumardii* var. *acerifolia*, but Nick Stoyhoff and William Hess of The Morton Arboretum have accumulated data to support its status as a distinct species.



Quercus acerifolia. Photo Courtesy of The Morton Arboretum.

In the future, we will continue to add oaks to our collections, with an emphasis on species not yet represented. Most new accessions will be from wild populations, such as the *Q. robur* that I collected in Russia last year.

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