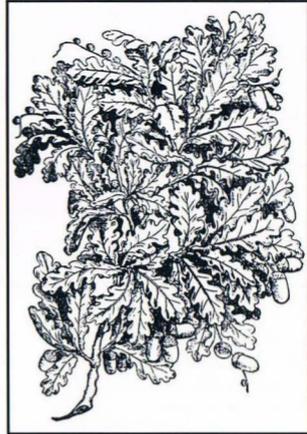


The English Oak (*Quercus Robur* L.): An Oak Common in France

by Stephane Brame
Villeneuve le Comte, France

The English oak, or common European oak, is found in almost all of France, except in the extreme south (the Mediterranean region) and in the mountains above 1000 meters altitude. It grows in a large part of temperate Europe, tolerating different climates in maritime as well as continental climate zones, and grows in both acidic and alkaline soils. However, it often is replaced by pubescent oak (*Q. pubescens* Willd.) on hot and chalky sites, and by durmast oak (*Q. petraea* Liebl.) in some drier upland forest areas.

English oak is able to become established in either dry or moist soil. It reaches its greatest size (30-40 meters tall) in mesic sites with deep soils and open, luminous exposure. Natural groves of English oak also can be found on rather shallow soils. The roots of this species are able to thrive in the clefts of rocky soils as long as they are provided sufficient water. Although it is quite hardy in France, many old specimens show frost cracks in mountainous areas.



Quercus robur (syn. *Q. pedunculata*)
woodcut from Petrus Andreas
Matthioli, Commentarii, etc.,
Venice 1565.

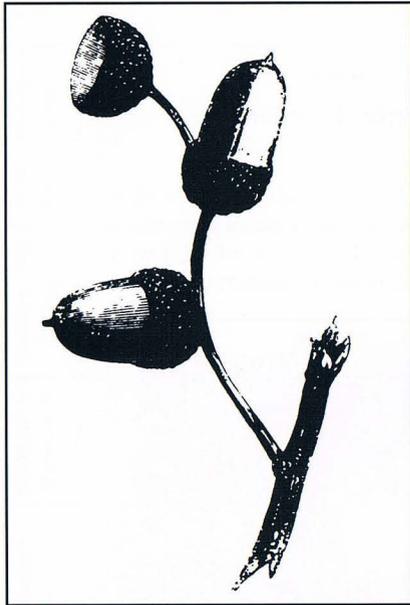
Although this oak is not considered a pioneer species, its leaf litter does contribute to the enrichment of poor soils. The tree sprouts vigorously from the stump when cut, and vigorous dominant sprouts

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English Oak in France . . .

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contribute effectively to the replacement stand. It is used as a reserve of copse because



Quercus robur twig with peduncle and acorns from A History of British Forest-Trees, Indigenous and Introduced. Prideaux John Selby, F.L.S., M.W.S., etc., London, 1842.

it makes an excellent fuel wood.

Old specimens isolated along roads or in open pastures typically have stout, short trunks and broad, rounded crowns. Trees grown in forest competition develop longer trunks, but they are less common in such habitats than our other common oak, *Q. petraea* Liebl., which is more adapted here to the forest environment. The wood is

sought for framing because it is very tough and resistant to insect damage.

In France, many areas have mixed forests of oaks and beech (*Fagus sylvatica* L.), and some old oak plantations eventually may be eliminated by natural succession to the more shade-tolerant beech. Acorns (glands in French) often are abundantly produced by big trees, and are eaten by rodents, wild boar, and some species of birds (e.g. jays).

The English oak is able to live for several centuries. There is a variety of English oak found in the eastern part of France (*Q. robur* var. *tardissima* Mathieu & Fliche) called the June oak because it unfolds its leaves about a month later than the type and therefore is not injured by spring frosts. Many other forms and cultivars may be seen in botanic collections, and I think some of the most striking are:

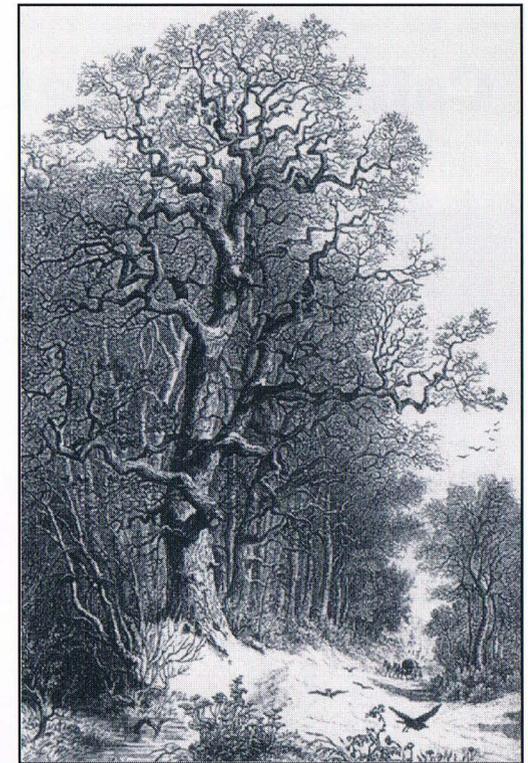
- *Q. robur* 'Variegata', having leaves variegated with white;
- *Q. robur* 'Concordia', with bright yellow leaves;
- *Q. robur* 'Asplenifolia', with pinnatifid leaves; and
- *Q. robur* 'Fastigiata', the popular cypress oak with columnar form.

English oak will hybridize in nature with almost all the other oak species growing in this area. For example, it crosses with *Q. lanuginosa* (Lam.) Thuill. (syn. *Q. pubescens* Willd. subsp. *pubescens*) to form *Q. xsemilanuginosa* (syn. *Q. xkernerii* Simonk. nothosubsp. *kernerii*); with *Q. toza* Gillet ex Bosc (syn. *Q. pyrenaica* Willd.) to form *Q.*

xandegavensis Hy; and with *Q. petraea* Liebl. to form *Q. xrosacea* Bechst. Of the many hybrids grown in cultivation, we especially note the handsome small tree called *Q. xhickellii* A. Camus (syn. *Q. 'Hickelii'*), a hybrid with *Q. pontica* K.Koch..

The two most common and most easily confused oak species in France, and throughout much of Europe, are the English oak and the durmast oak. They may be distinguished as shown in the accompanying chart (this page):

Editor's note: *Stephane Brame is one of our original members, and is known to many of us due to his generosity in collecting and exchanging seed. He owns Arboretum le Moulin Giraudeix in beautiful Corrèze, France, and lives near Paris. He had prepared this information about Quercus robur, the type species of the genus Quercus, for the first issue of what was to become the journal International Oaks, and we feature it now as our cover for this commemorative issue. The original artwork of Q. robur reproduced especially for this cover was painted and furnished courtesy of Michel Angeard, another French member of the International Oak Society. Historic illustrations were provided as duplicates by the library of Starhill Forest, Petersburg, Illinois USA, from the original sources cited.*



Forêt de chènes (Forest of oaks) from an old engraving in the collection of the Centre de documentation et d'information de la Société nationale d'horticulture de France.

English Oak

(*Q. robur*)

Shape: Generally irregular, with curving branches

Leaves: With very short petioles or sessile; lobes becoming larger near the distal end of the blade; rounded auricular lobes at the base; dark green and sometimes glaucous; not bright nor leathery

Acorns: Ovoid-cylindrical; borne on peduncles up to several cm in length

Durmast Oak

(*Q. petraea*)

Shape: Less irregular, with a differentiated crown

Leaves: With distinct petioles 1-2 cm long; lobes largest near the middle of the blade; no auricular lobes at the base; shiny green, often somewhat leathery

Acorns: More globular; borne on very short peduncles or sessile