

Aiken, South Carolina - Oak City, U.S.A.!

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Aiken, South Carolina was honored to have the International Oak Society visit our city during their post-conference field trip in October of 2000. Conference hosts organized this trip to the warmer climate region of coastal South Carolina and Georgia so members could see noteworthy oak specimens and view an additional variety of oak species.

Aiken, a town of about 26,000 is located in the Fall Line Sandhills of South Carolina about 15 miles from Augusta, Georgia. The Fall Line Sandhills are an ancient coastline with high rolling hills of deep, sandy soil. Lying between the relatively flat Coastal Plain and the rolling dry hills of the Piedmont Plateau, the Sandhills once supported an extensive forest of longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) maintained by relatively frequent ground fires. Originally ignited by lightning and later also by humans, these low-intensity fires burned unimpeded over vast areas and maintained a uniquely adapted ecosystem. With land-use changes and fire suppression, this ecosystem has almost disappeared. Many fire-adapted species that characterized this ecosystem have become quite rare.



Fig. 1. A majestic old sand post oak (*Quercus margaretta*) preserved along a street in Aiken, SC.
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Many oak species are native in the Sandhills region and in the absence of fire have become more abundant. On xeric upland sites the common species include turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*), sand post oak (*Q. margaretta*), and bluejack oak (*Q. incana*). Where there is more clay in the soil, blackjack oak (*Q. marilandica*) may be present. On steeper slopes with better soil and where fire was less frequent, southern red oak (*Q. falcata*), scarlet oak (*Q. coccinea*), post oak (*Q. stellata*), black oak (*Q. velutina*), and white oak (*Q. alba*) occur with water oak (*Q. nigra*). On some upland sites Darlington Oak (*Q. hemisphaerica*) is common. Locally common in the Sandhills is a shrub or small- to medium-sized tree in the live oak (*Q. virginiana*) complex. Occasionally with quite pendulous branches or with very small leaves, this plant

may merit further taxonomic study. Finally, the floodplains of larger rivers such as the Savannah River harbor other oak species such as the cherrybark oak (*Q. pagoda*), overcup oak (*Q. lyrata*), laurel oak (*Q. laurifolia*), and swamp white oak (*Q. michauxii*).

Virtually all of these oaks, including many large specimens, are growing in Aiken. In addition, there are many non-native species in the broad tree-filled parkways, large private properties, and parks throughout the city. This provides an unusually diverse and healthy urban forest. Most of the native oaks can also be found growing naturally within the 2000 acre Hitchcock Woods Preserve almost in the middle of Aiken. Chestnut oak (*Q. montana*) and northern red oak (*Q. rubra*), both uncommon in the area, can be found in Hitchcock Woods.

Building on the extensive variety of oaks already in Aiken, Woodlanders Inc., an international source for rare and hard-to-find plants, has, over the past two decades, added steadily to the



Fig. 2. A young bluff oak (*Quercus austrina*) planted by Bob McCartney along a boulevard in Aiken, SC.

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collection. From seed collections throughout the South and from various sources, Woodlanders has grown and planted out an increasingly diverse selection of oaks and oak relatives. In recent years, the International Oak Society, through generous assistance of Guy Sternberg and Ron Lance, has made it possible for Woodlanders to obtain acorns of many additional oak species from around the world. These are being grown and planted out. With attention to soil and site conditions, the mild climate of Aiken makes it possible to grow many kinds of evergreen oaks and oak relatives that are not hardy enough to be planted further north.

Within the last few years, Woodlanders, working with the City of Aiken, has established a

Fig. 3. A mature Darlington oak (*Quercus hemisphaerica*) preserved as a street tree in Aiken, SC.

Photo copyright Guy and Edie Sternberg

one-mile-long linear planting of new oak species in a broad grass strip along Park Avenue on the east side of Aiken. Spaced at about 70 feet apart, these plants represent species and hybrids not previously found here. Included are both evergreen and deciduous trees with many western, southwestern, Mexican, European, and Asian species represented. Mature sizes will vary from quite small to quite large. Additional species now in production are scheduled to be established in another linear planting strip nearby.

This collection and these trees will surely prove to be an attractive asset to the community for years to come. With careful documentation, it will become a useful resource for urban foresters, horticulturists, gardeners, botanists, and serious students of the genus *Quercus*.

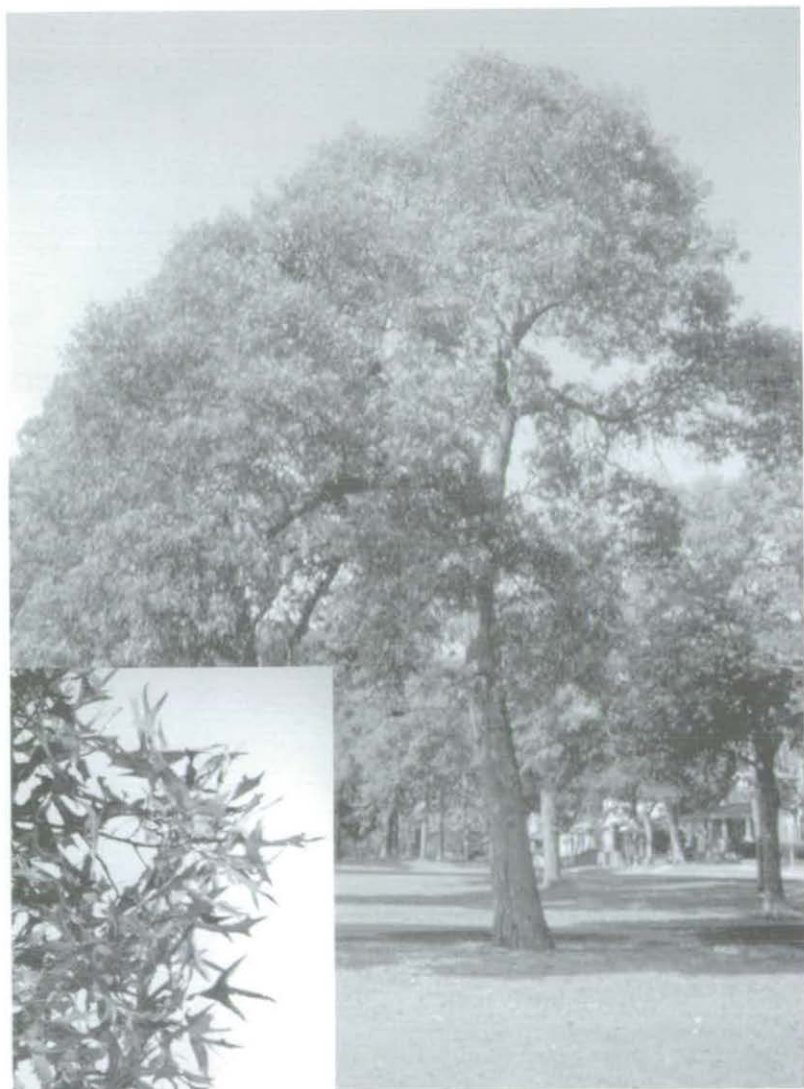


Fig. 4. A very large turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*) preserved as a street tree in Aiken, SC.

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Fig. 5. An Asian ring-cupped oak (*Quercus salicina*) originating from plants brought from Nagasaki, Japan, planted by Bob McCartney in Aiken, SC.

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Fig. 6. Monterrey oak (*Quercus rhysophylla*) from Northeast Mexico, planted by Bob McCartney in Aiken, SC.

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OAKS AND OAK RELATIVES PLANTED OUT IN AIKEN, SC:

Oak Relatives

Castaneaopsis cuspidata
Lithocarpus edulis
L. chinensis
L. glaber
L. henryi
L. kawakami

Oaks, Various locations

Quercus acuta
Q. alba
Q. austrina
Q. chapmanii
Q. coccinea
Q. durandii
Q. falcata
Q. geminata
Q. hemisphaerica
Q. hypoleucoides
Q. laevis
Q. margaretta
Q. marylandica
Q. michauxii
Q. minima
Q. mohriana
Q. myrsinaefolia
Q. nigra
Q. oglethorpensis
Q. palustris
Q. phellos
Q. pumila
Q. rubra
Q. salicina
Q. shumardii
Q. sp. (Chiricahua Mtns, AZ)
Q. stellata
Q. velutina
Q. virginiana

One mile planting along R.R. (W to E)

Quercus sartorii x *canbyi*
Q. dalechampii
Q. agrifolia
Q. schotkyana
Q. pungens
Q. polymorpha
Q. glauca
Q. incana
Q. sp. (Queretaro, Mexico)
Q. arkansana

Q. castanea x *sapotifolia*
Q. ilicifolia
Q. montana
Q. robur 'Fastigiata'
Q. canariensis
Q. polymorpha
Q. myrtifolia x *nigra*
Q. virginiana x *lyrata* (*Q. xcomptonae*)
Q. rhyssophylla
Q. georgiana
Q. obtusata
Q. sartorii
Q. lyrata
Q. phillyreioides
Q. pagoda
Q. bicolor
Q. laceyi
Q. muhlenbergii
Q. imbricaria
Q. ilex
Q. graciliformis
Q. fusiformis
Q. cerris
Q. affinis
Q. virgiliana
Q. pubescens var. *anotolica*
Q. sartorii
Q. prinoides
Q. grisea
Q. gravesii
Q. vaseyana
Q. polymorpha (S. Texas source)
Q. oblongifolia
Q. faginea
Q. arizonica
Q. nuttallii
Q. sinuata breviloba
Q. xlibanerris
Q. robur x *dalechampii*
Q. inopina
Q. muhlenbergii (Mexico)
Q. sp. (Mexico)
Q. myrtifolia
Q. engelmannii
Q. laurifolia
Q. pungens
Q. marylandica var. *ashei*
Q. undulata
Q. tomentella
Q. emoryii

Some species in one-mile planting along railroad may also be found at other locations elsewhere in Aiken. Also, some naturally-occurring hybrids may not be listed here. Many additional oak species are being grown and are being added to this list as they are planted.